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WORLD OF NEVER-MEN

by Edmond Hamilton

JULY, 1957



Imaginative Tales

ACTION-PACKED SCIENCE FICTION

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William L. Hamling
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The Editorial.....

DON'T look now, but the other side of the Moon won't be a mystery much longer. Space travel skeptics were set back on their heels some time ago with the announcement that our government plans to have a small "satellite" circling the Earth during the soon-arriving geophysical year celebration. Nice celebration. But to top things quite suitably it is now subtly announced that we'll probably have a rocket circle the Moon—also during the geo-physical year—equipped with cameras to photograph the other side of Luna. The space travel skeptics must be really rocked by that one. Not only rocked but literally sent reeling. The implication is obvious. Within a far shorter period than the most optimistic scientists would allow, man himself will replace the cameras and have a good look-see for himself.

IT'S amazing how matter-of-factness space travel is becoming with the general public. In science fiction we've talked about it for years; it's old-hat to us—even before Man achieves it. But the guy down the street has been a tough cookie to convince—up until now. With the stories being planted in the press throughout the nation, and feature science articles on the subject finding their way into many leading publications, the attitude of those outside science fiction has

undergone a considerable change. We talked to a friend recently—a chap who never would read science fiction: "Can't stand that impossible stuff!" but who now blithely tells us when space travel is referred to, "Well, it's about time. With all the dough we're spending on research we should be up there right now!" Hmmm.

WE'D like to revise our own prediction schedule a bit, in line with recent developments. We thought we'd sure live to see the Moon visited by Men. But heck, that's on the ticket for tomorrow. We now are firmly convinced that somebody's going to have a bird's-eye view of dear old Venus before the century expires. And if Venus is achieved it stands to reason that Mars will be a follow-up; or, it may be that because Mars is a more "popular" planet it may get the first nod of those who decide such things. Anyway, if you're in your thirties or younger (happily we qualify!) you have an excellent chance of still being around when the canals of Mars are mapped by on-the-spot survey.

IN the meantime all of us can have a whale of a good time with science fiction, for no matter how rapidly our technology advances, our fiction will always be a few parsecs ahead—giving science a prod to carry on. wllh



"I hate to be a wet blanket, but what do we do next?"



WORLD OF NEVER-MEN

by

Edmond Hamilton

Barker set out on a trail of vengeance that would lead him to retribution—or death. It would also, inevitably, bind him to Mars' dark secret . . .



SOMEONE REACHED OUT a hand from the black, blind niche of the doorway and caught him as he passed.

Colin Barker crouched and whirled in the narrow darkness of the alley, leaping away from that grasp. His gun, a solid heavy Earth-made weapon, fairly sprang into his palm.

"Come out of there," he said in rapid Martian. "Come out or you die."

He was not exactly nervous, or

frightened. Rather he was keyed-up, intensely alert and wary as a wolf. The note the child had brought to him at his quarters on the native side of the Ganshaw Canal had been urgent, mysterious, and unsigned, containing a word that might not be ignored when passed between friends. He was an old hand on Mars, what the lily-whites called a red-dust man, and he was not taking any more chances than his curiosity demanded.

"Come out!" he said again.

A shadow stirred in the blackness of the doorway. A voice, pitched very low, said, "Colin *remshi*, it is Arrik. Please, do not trumpet the whole quarter awake! Come in, quickly."

A streak of light, dim in itself but quite bright compared to the darkness of the alley with both moons out of the sky, showed itself in the niche. Barker hesitated, peering with narrow eyes at the silhouette revealed now in the partly open door.

"Any man can call me friend," he said, "and any man can borrow a name. If you are Arrik —"

"Colin *remshi*," said the shadow in the doorway, "you are no help to a hunted man. Now when I helped *you* on the roofs at Four Cool Wells —"

Barker grinned and put the gun back in its holster. "All right," he said, and went swiftly through the doorway. The Martian closed and barred it behind him. Then he turned and faced Barker.

Barker put his hands on the Martian's shoulders. "Arrik *remshi*. Many a wind has blown since the last time we met." He hated to think how many. Some good, some bad, some neither the one nor the other, but a lot of them. Arrik was the friend of his youth, and youth was yesterday.

Arrik smiled. His grip on Barker's arms was as warm as ever. He had not changed, with the timelessness of his people. But his eyes were shadowed, and behind his smile there was fear.

"You need help," said Barker. "Ask it."

Arrik turned from him and checked the fastenings of the door again. Then he crossed the small room and made sure the shutters of the single window were barred. A flight of steps, very narrow and twisting, went up in one corner to an upper room and on to the roof. Arrik listened there for a minute, but there was no sound. Then he seemed to relax, as though he had done all he could in that line and so was going to forget it.

"You were not followed?"

"I don't think so. What are you doing in this part of Mars? Who is hunting you?"

Arrik answered the last question first. "I don't know. But I've been followed all the way from Kirruk. Someone there found out that I had come across the Bitter Sea."

Barker frowned. The Bitter Sea was not a real sea, but only the dead corpse of one. It was as evil a bowl of drifting dust, sand and salt as you could find on Mars, and few men crossed it. But he could not see why that should get one

followed, and he said so.

"Why," said Arrik, "you're an Earthman after all, *remshi*. The littlest child in this quarter could tell you who lives across the Bitter Sea and beyond the Qed Range — the Mountains-the-Gods-Cursed — in a hidden city called Chelorne, in a hidden valley no man has ever seen since the time the last ocean dried up."

"Oh, that," said Barker. "I know the legend. The men without navels, the men who were made, not born. Moonshine." He stared at Arrik with sudden intensity. "Now don't tell me *you've* seen them."

"Not the hidden city in the hidden valley, no. But I saw — something very strange. I was trading along the southern spurs of the Qed Range, farther in than ever you and I went together in the old days, farther than I had ever been before. I found some very fine objects of worked gold and polished stone in some of the villages, and I wanted more of them. They told me they traded for them with Llona, a village on the other side of the mountains, and they showed me the pass that led there. I was halfway through that pass when a yellow wind began to blow. And there was no refuge."

THE YELLOW WINDS were the great dust-storms. There

was always dust blowing on Mars, and that and the thinness of the air were why there was almost no air-travel on the old planet, not even by Earthmen. But when a yellow wind blew, not even the caravans moved.

Barker had seen more than one, had seen the loose substance of half a continent pick up and go flying through the air in a rolling, boiling, howling, gale-driven mass, semi-solid, and as murderous as an ocean torn from its bed. He had seen towns and villages disappear with their whole populations, while others forgotten for centuries came to light again, perfectly preserved by the dry sand.

Arrik said, "I had three *vents* with me, heavily laden. I kept on as long as I could, but two of the beasts fell and were quickly buried, and finally the third one also fell and I with it. I covered my head and prepared to die. And then I was lifted up. Three men had come out of the storm."

Arrik shook his head. "I doubt if you will believe this, *remshi*, but it is true. They brought me *and* the surviving beast back out of the pass alive. They found us a cave to shelter in, and then they went on — just as though the yellow wind was of no moment to them. That was not a human thing to do, Colin! When the wind died

the whole face of the desert was changed and I could not go back the way I came, so I was forced to go across the Bitter Sea to Kirruk. By the time I got there I was babbling with the desert sickness — and someone heard. Someone who knew the old legend, and believed that my saviors were not true men but the androids created by an ancient science."

He paused, and then added grimly, "Someone who wanted very much to know the location of that pass. I believe an Earthman is behind it, though I've never seen him. But his Martian cutthroats have spoken to me. I barely escaped them in Kirruk, and I think they followed me here to Ganshaw."

He finished simply, "That is why I need help. They believe I have knowledge of value, and they will kill to get it."

"Yes," said Barker. "I see that." For a moment he allowed himself to become excited by Arrik's story. Androids. Artificial men, which modern science had for decades been trying to create, but utterly without success. Suppose now they had been created long ago in the bright ages of Mars' past before the planet began to die, when the city-states were fierce if bloodless rivals for scientific supremacy. Suppose the half-forgotten legends were true and

androids still actually lived, hiding in the forsaken out-back of Mars. Suppose they still knew the secret of their own creation. What would a man not do to get hold of that secret? Murder would be the least of it.

"I prefer to believe," he said to Arrik, "that the men who saved you were only some unusually sturdy mountaineers. But whatever they were, you personally are in a jam. My right arm is yours, *remshi* — of course. But we must think beyond that. The authorities ought to know —"

He did not get any farther. He saw Arrik's sudden startled look past him. He turned, very swiftly. He saw a man come leaping down the stair from above, hunched like a big cat, and he had his gun almost out of the holster when the bolt from the stun-gun in the stranger's hand hit him and there was no transition between light and dark, between feeling and not-feeling. He did not even know it when he fell.

COMING TO AND GETTING up again were different. They were slow. Feeling came first, long before sight or understanding. It crept along his nerve-paths like the eating of fire along lengths of string. It became intolerable, and he twitched and moaned and

twisted. Movement only made it worse. Finally it drove him to open his eyes and stagger up in a vain effort to get away from the torment.

He saw a man lying on a dirt floor. He looked at him for a long time, trying to puzzle out a meaning that he knew was there but could not grasp. There were marks and stains on the dirt. The man's body had been stripped of almost all its clothing and there were marks and stains on it, too, scarring the lean swarthy flesh. The body itself lay in a distorted position. The eyes were open. They shone like bits of dark glass, flat and empty in the lamplight. The handle of a knife stood up between the ribs, over the heart. And after a while Barker understood.

The man was Arrik. He had been tortured, expertly and without pity. Then he had been killed — with Barker's knife.

"*Remshi*," said Barker softly. "Oh God." He stood swaying in the cold room, not knowing what to do. Then instinct drove him where reason refused to function. He bent and drew the knife from Arrik's breast. Arrik's head moved and Barker cried, "Don't. Don't — I'm sorry, I must take the knife or no one will believe I didn't kill you myself. That's how they planned it, that's why I'm still alive —"

He drove the blade again and again into the dirt floor to cleanse it, moving convulsively, his face contorted with rage and sorrow and the physical sickness of shock. He closed the knife and put it in his pocket, and all the time he heard himself talking. *I'll find them, Arrik. I'll kill them. Don't worry, remshi, I'll get them. I'll get them—*

He knew he had to get out of there. He knew he had to stop talking aloud and go quietly, very quietly, so that no one should see him. He walked unsteadily to the door and was about to open it, and then he remembered how the light had shone behind Arrik in the doorway. He went back and blew out the lamp. He was a little calmer now, not in his right mind yet but functioning more smoothly. He opened the door carefully and looked out.

And he saw flashlights in the narrow alley, several of them, coming his way, the beams playing quickly and searchingly over the walls and windows and doors.

In this quarter of Ganshaw, the only people who used flashlights in that fashion were the police.

CHAPTER II

THE POLICE. Symbols, in bi-racial cities like Ganshaw, of

the cooperation between two worlds, the forces of peace and progress. One Martian, one Earthman, uniformed and paired, always patrolling together for mutual support and protection. From the number of lights Barker judged that there were two pairs where he could see them and possibly others where he could not. They were on foot because the squad cars couldn't get into the narrow streets.

He wondered who had called them. Then he realized that of course the killers had, planning that they should find Arrik's body with Barker's knife in him and Barker beside him. It had almost worked.

It still would work if he did not move fast. Very fast indeed.

He closed the door and barred it and felt his way in the pitch darkness to the stair, avoiding Arrik's body with almost hysterical care. When he was halfway up the stair the pounding began on the door and now there were voices outside. He ignored them. The room above was full of light. He looked up and saw the trap to the roof still open and Phobos peering through it like a little yellow eye. The killers had come and gone this way. He climbed the second stair and crawled out onto the roof.

It was empty. The uneven checkerboard of flat squares and oblongs on either side of him ap-

peared to be empty too, though he could not hope that would last long. The wind, fiercely cold and laden with the dry mummy-dust of a world already three parts dead, cleared his head and steadied him.

The clamor in the alley below was increasing. The whole quarter was beginning to stir. Keeping low, Barker ran away over the roofs, angling to the southeast.

To the west, on the other side of the canal, the new city threw a strident glare into the night sky. That was Earth, transplanted into alien soil and flourishing there, bursting with skyscrapers and neon lights burgeoning with trade and enterprise, sparked with the fires of the ceaseless rockets that came and went from the port beyond. The way Barker was going there was darkness and old Mars. There was time and infinite secrets, drab necessity and dreary death, beauty, strangeness, awe. He had taken this turn long before, when his beard was still downy on his chin. Sometimes he had regretted it. But by then he was a red-dust man, and it was too late. He had not regretted it often.

He fled soft-footed over the flat roofs in the Phobos-light. And somebody yelled behind him. "There! There he runs!"

A man popped out of a roof hatch directly in front of him. He

saw Barker and shouted and spread his arms to catch him. Barker hit him solidly in the face and he fell aside. The adjoining roof was lower. Barker jumped down, sped across it, and looked over the low parapet into the courtyard below. He could not see anything in it but shadows. He swung himself over the parapet, hung to the full stretch of his arms, and dropped.

He lit rolling, scrambled to his feet and went on again, running hard now. The hue and cry was spreading behind him. More voices were joining it, more lights shone from the rooftops or moved in the streets. Barker left the courtyard for a transverse crack threading between the buildings, turned out of that through a broken conduit of corbelled stone that had carried water to this city when it was new, and stood panting on the edge of an open square.

By day this was a market-place. By night it was a well collecting shadows, clotting them thick and black under the awnings. The buildings around it were taller, larger, more elaborate. In the pale moonlight the faces of old gods and forgotten kings looked down from the crumbling cornices.

A MAN WAS STANDING in the middle of it. His white

robe was drawn over his head and the folds of it stirred and fluttered in the wind. He leaned on a stick. The top of it was carved in the likeness of a fantastic bird, and his two hands rested on the outspread wings.

Barker said softly, "Phardon?"

The man in the white robe said, "Come to me."

Barker hesitated.

"No one sees or hears," said Phardon. "Come, Colin Barker."

Barker stepped out into the moonlight, over the worn flags. Priests and princes had walked here in the old times. Now only the wind walked. Barker said,

"They hunt me for a killing. I am innocent."

Phardon said, "Stretch out your hands."

He did so holding them steady in the moonlight. The man in the white robe bent his head and looked at them, silent and intent. Then he said,

"There is no blood on your hands. But your mind is full of it."

"For the killers, Phardon. The man was my friend."

"Ah," said Phardon. "Well, come."

He turned and walked across the square and into a street beyond. He walked swiftly for an old man, nobody knew how old. Barker was not surprised that

Phardon had known he was coming. He had half expected to meet him somewhere along the way. Phardon's winged staff was the outward sign of his mastery of ancient skills and wisdoms, and at least some of them were genuine.

A few minutes later they were standing in a lofty room, much ruined and inadequately lighted but still beautiful, with an inlaid floor and wall-paintings dimmed and softened by time. Phardon stood with his head erect, listening.

"They're hunting for an *Earthman*," Barker said.

Phardon nodded. "Ten, perhaps fifteen minutes. They are searching every alley." He pointed to an arched doorway. "In there you will find what you need."

Barker went into the next room and began to strip. While he did so he talked, telling Phardon exactly what Arrik had told him, and what had happened then. Phardon listened. He had laid aside his white robe now, and his staff, standing revealed as a stringy ancient in a not too clean dress of woolen stuff girdled around his body. But his head was like the heads in the old sculptures, with a splendid brow and a fine stern face and eyes that were disconcertingly penetrating.

Now they were positively incandescent. "The men of Chelorne,"

he said. "The men without navels. Yes — for that secret, men would kill willingly. Even for the chance of it."

"They tortured him," Barker said. "They must have made him talk before he died." He knotted his girdle with angry movements, as though he were twisting necks instead of a length of cloth. "The man I saw on the stair was Martian. Probably whoever was with him was too. But Arrik mentioned an Earthman he thought was behind it."

Phardon's eyes narrowed. "And the Earthmen who live in the cities beyond Treaty law are more wolves than men."

He picked up Barker's discarded clothes, rolled them compactly together, and thrust the bundle out of sight in the niche of a shrine that dominated the room — a huge representation of a complex atom done in gold wire and semi-precious stones, upheld by the two symbolic genii of Life and Thought. Barker flung the old man's third-best cloak around him and drew the end over his head.

When he followed Phardon back into the main room there was no vestige of the Earthman left about him. Even his gait and carriage had changed, and the dark-eyed, lean-featured face under the fold of the cloak were as Martian-look-

ing as a blend of Black Scot and Mohawk Indian could provide, which was good enough.

When the police arrived, he was sitting at Phardon's feet in the draughty dusk of the big room, imbibing wisdom.

THEY WERE TAKING the houses one by one in pairs, their usual procedure, and there was a considerable mob with them. The Martian policeman spoke to Phardon with suitable reverence, apologizing for the disturbance. The Earthman, a beefy young man with a painfully wind-burned face that would never be anything but bright pink, was not impressed. He looked hard at Barker. He looked hard all around the room, and he looked especially hard at the shadowy archway into the room of the shrine.

Phardon said, "No killer has come this way. I would have known."

"How?" asked the Earth policeman, in bad Martian.

"The wind is my messenger," said Phardon coldly, and the Martians in the crowd all muttered that this was so.

"Well," said the Earthman, "maybe so, but I got to have a look around anyway. Who's he?" He pointed at Barker.

"One who seeks knowledge."

"Hey, you," said the pink-faced man. "Seen an Earthman around here? A scared Earthman, running?"

Barker shook his head. He allowed the very real hostility he felt for the young man to show in his face.

The Martian cop said uneasily, "Come on. There is nothing here."

But the Earthman sensed something. Or perhaps he was only foolish, a newcomer to Mars irked by the pretensions of what he would always consider an inferior race. Perhaps he was angry because one of his own kind had committed a crime that could not possibly be condoned, putting him in a bad light.

"No," he said. "We searched all the other places, I'm gonna search this one too."

He proceeded to do it, ignoring Phardon's icy glare and the protests of the crowd. He was quite thorough about it. He examined the two curtained alcoves in the main room. He probed into the contents of three huge chests. Barker watched him, standing quiet, each separate nerve drawn taut and quivering like a plucked bowstring.

The pink-faced man grunted and went into the room of the shrine.

The Martian cop, greatly dis-

turbed, rushed and took him by the arm and tried to lead him away. The main room was now half full of people. The Earthman shook his partner off impatiently, and proceeded with the search.

Phardon demanded in a voice of thunder, "Have you no respect for a sacred shrine?"

"Yes, sir," said the policeman, "but I have respect for my orders too, and my orders were to search. After all, sir, it's one of your own people's been killed."

He walked toward the niche.

Barker ran and stood before the shrine. He wasn't acting. He didn't have to.

"Dog!" he cried, in the pure vernacular of the streets. "Dog" was not exactly the word, but the Martian equivalent. "Swine of an Earthman! You call our wise and holy teacher a liar, and then you desecrate his household shrine!" He looked beyond the Earthman, to the already angry crowd. "I am unarmed, as custom demands in the house of a wise man. Yet I will defend his shrine. Will you?"

They said they would, and surged forward. The Earthman hesitated, looking ugly and a little bit alarmed. His hand dropped to his holstered gun. The Martian cop grabbed him again, this time in genuine panic, asking him what in the name of his Earthly gods he was trying

to do. Phardon flung up his arm in a commanding gesture.

"Let there be no violence here. The Earthman has surely seen that I am hiding no one. He will go now."

"Come on," said the Martian cop fiercely. "Anyway, who could hide in that niche?"

The Earthman gave it one last glance and shrugged. "All right," he said. "I was only doing my duty." He walked past Phardon, and the crowd parted reluctantly to let him through. Barker stood where he was, shaking, until the police were gone and the crowd after them, and the house of Phardon was quiet again. Then he sat down, feeling as frail and empty as a piece of crumpled paper. He had been through too much in far too short a time.

Phardon brought him wine, and he drank it. The bitter stuff did not fill the void inside him, but it warmed it and made it more bearable. Phardon said slowly.

"What will you do now?"

"The man was my *remshi*," Barker said. "For many years we were traders together. He was the brother of my wife, who is with her ancestors."

"Ah," said Phardon. "According to the new law of the Treaty, you must do nothing about this, trusting in the justice of the police. Accord-

ing to the old law of my people, there is a blood debt which you must pay. So you have a choice, Colin Barker."

Barker shook his head. "I have no choice. The debt is mine, and I will pay it."

He drew the cloak closer around him.

"I'll keep these clothes. When the quarter is clear I start for Kirruk. The man I want is there, or if he came down with his killers — which I doubt — he must go back there, because the way to Arrik's pass lies north from there across the Bitter Sea. He'll need a caravan. And I have a thought."

"I have one, too," said Phardon. "It is that the guilty man will have you slain the day you come to Kirruk."

"Not if I live long enough to say what is in my mind to say."

Barker took the knife from the inside of his borrowed tunic and snapped it open and looked at the little rusty stains still clinging to the blade.

"I'll live that long," he said. "I must."

CHAPTER III

AND HE HAD LIVED that long. By canal boat and caravan he had worked his way north from Ganshaw, travelling swiftly, a Mar-

tian among Martians. He had been in Kirruk for two hours now, and he was still alive. He had made inquiries at the caravanserai where he was lodging. And he was on his way to find the man who was acknowledged leader of the small renegade colony. Howard Skene.

He walked carefully, turning often to see what was behind him. It was afternoon and the streets were busy. Kirruk served the caravans in that whole quadrant of Mars as supply base, marshalling point, terminus and exchange. A perpetual dust-cloud hung over it, and its ancient walls rang with the bawling of animals and the cries of men. It had been a seaport town once, but all that part of it was long dead, crumbling ruins around the broken quays. Now only the part of it that centered around the brackish wells, the paddocks and the serais, swarmed with life and sound.

Barker turned from these busy places into a way that still bore its ancient name, the Street of the Sailmakers. It ran sloping down toward the deep valley that had been the harbor, and from its top Barker could look out over the salt-pans and the creeping ocher dunes of the dead sea bottom. Here the wind and the dust had a biting quality. Barker pulled the folds of Phardon's cloak higher to

protect his face. When he was out of reach of Treaty Law he had put on his boots and trousers again, but he had retained the cloak, the native garment that marked him as a red-dust man.

He saw the sign he was looking for on a building wall, and passed through a low doorway into a dim public room. For a moment he could not see anybody. And then a woman came out of the shadows at the back and stood looking at him.

"Hello," he said, and smiled.

She didn't answer him. She was young, with a mass of black hair coiled up around her head and held with gold pins. Her eyes were black and wild as a sand-cat's, insolent, assured. She walked back and forth a few steps, still looking at him, moving just enough to let him see how very well made she was and how lightly her sandalled feet stepped on the flagstones. Then she said,

"And who are you?"

A man had come into the room now from a side entrance. A Martian, probably the tavern-keeper. Barker said to the girl,

"Nobody you'd know. I want to see Skene."

"Oh," she said. "Is that so? Skene doesn't jump for every sand-rat that comes squeaking for him." She tossed her head, making the

yellow jewels dance in her ears.

"I see," said Barker, and smiled again. This was obviously Skene's girl, and extremely proud of it. "I think he'll see me. Tell him it's business. Big business."

"And who do you think you're giving orders to?" she demanded. "Tell him eh?" She turned away.

"I can see you need to be taught—"

Without rancor, Barker reached out and caught her and gave her a resounding crack across the place where her skirt was tightest.

"Tell him," he said.

"Vrenn!" she screamed. "Kill him! Kill him!"

Barker caught a flicker of movement to his left, and he didn't stop to ask Vrenn whether he intended to kill him or merely to make him let go of the girl. He dropped her and swung around. The tavern-keeper was almost on top of him. He hit him hard on the jaw, and then he hit him twice more. The man went down on his knees and stayed there.

Barker spun around again, just in time to catch the girl's upraised arm. He slapped the little dagger out of her hand and said plaintively,

"I asked you politely, you know. And I don't think Skene would like it if you killed me. I'm worth a lot of money to him."

"Ylva," said a man's voice sharply from above. There was a stairway in the corner, and a man had come out on the landing of it. He was a short-legged, thick-chested man, wind-burned and leathery as a native but with very blue eyes and light hair. The girl Ylva twisted around and began to squall at him in a perfect tantrum of fury. He began to laugh. He came down the stairs laughing, but his eyes were cold and hard, sizing up Barker the way a predator sizes up a potential enemy.

"It's all right, Vrenn," he said to the tavern-keeper, who had got up again. "And as for you, Ylva —" He took her from Barker's grasp and held her so she couldn't move. "You tell me next time, eh? When it's a matter of business, it's not to be played with. Now you go while the men talk."

SHE STARED AT HIM for a minute, her eyes still filmed with rage. He shook her gently and smiled, and she gave a convulsive little quiver and dropped her head. He took his hands away and she left the room quickly, going out the back.

"She's still just a kid," the Earthman said, in English. "And a wild one, too. I bought her off a caravan. She needs a spanking once in a while. I'm Skene. Who

are you?"

Barker told him, thinking, This man is the leader here, the king-wolf. He could be the murderer. And I could kill him now if I struck fast enough. But I have to be sure. I have to be sure beyond the shadow of a doubt.

He said, "I have a proposition. I can give it to you in one word."

The tavern-keeper was gone, too. For the moment they were alone. Barker said softly,

"Chelorne."

Skene's eyes widened, and then narrowed again to two bright unwavering slits.

"Don't waste my time with foolishness," he said.

"It wasn't foolishness for the man who was tortured to death for the secret," said Barker with cold savagery. "If you sent the killers yourself, you know that. If you didn't you'd better listen to me, because one of your men is planning to do a big thing all by himself, without letting you know. If you're interested, I'll fill in the background."

Skene said slowly, "Yes, I'm interested. Sit down."

They sat down, and Barker spoke briefly and clearly. When he was through Skene said,

"That's a big mess of stuff you want me to swallow down, but all right. For argument's sake we'll

say you didn't kill the man yourself and you're a loyal *remshi* in the old Martian style. That leaves you with a blood debt — and what else?"

"This," said Barker, speaking slowly and distinctly. "My brother-in-law talked to me before the hired killers came, and he lived for a little bit after they were gone, long enough to say a word or two."

This was a complete lie, but not too big a one.

He had a bigger one to tell.

He told it. "Arrik told me the whole of the road to Chelorne. He told the killers only the first stage of the journey, letting them believe that was all he knew. He was a true man. Even while they were torturing him he was planning a way for me to avenge him."

He leaned back, permitting himself a very hard smile.

"That's my life insurance, Skene. I don't think even the guilty man will kill me. Because if he does, all his trouble will be wasted. He'll never find what he's looking for."

"The guilty man," said Skene, "might decide to try the torture method once more."

"It wouldn't work, any more than it did the first time. Besides, it's risky. Men have a way of dying out from under you."

"True," said Skene. "True."

"Well, there it is. I suppose you don't have to be told what actually finding the androids would be worth in terms of dollars and exchange credits. I can find them for you —"

"In return for what?"

"A fair share of the profits — and the killer. I don't even ask for help. Only for no hindrance."

"Suppose," asked Skene, "that it's me?"

"That would make for a very interesting association."

Skene laughed. Barker almost thought he was honestly amused, as by a good joke. Skene shouted to the tavern-keeper to bring wine, and when it was brought he said to Barker,

"All right, friend. Let's talk."

TWO HOURS OR SO LATER, when the low sun was filling the streets with shadows and stroking long strands of dull purple and faint gold across the seabottom, Barker left the tavern. He did not go alone. There was a man with him, a Martian of the type Barker had often taken a shot at around the desert waterholes. A jackal, he would have called him, if there had been jackals on Mars, sharp-snouted and shifty-pawed, with eyes that seemed to look all ways at once. It crossed

his mind that this might be one of the men who had killed Arrik, the one Barker had not seen.

"Murnik is a good man," Skene had said. "He'll watch your back, just to make sure no nasty mistakes are made. I'll send word to the others — we'll meet here around the first moonrise. Until then —"

"I have enough to keep me busy," Barker said.

And now he and Murnik walked side by side in the cold streets, with their cloaks drawn tight against the stinging dust. Gleams of lamplight came through shuttered windows sunk deep in the thick stone walls — walls that had taken the wet breath of the sea as now they took the dry wind of the desert, their softer veins eaten away by gentle chafing of thousands of years into curious patterns. The crowds of merchants and traders, travellers and caravan men were seeking the shelter of the serais and wine-shops. Torches flickered in the public squares. Somewhere a woman sang, far-off and sad, to the rippling of a harp.

Like old waves on a forgotten beach, thought Barker. And is Skene — Howard Skene, born and raised by an ocean called the Pacific on Earth — is he the murderer I want? He's like a piece of rock with all the corners off it. You

can't get hold of him, you can't crack him, and he's too damned heavy to push.

Or is it one of the others? One I haven't met yet, waiting for me at moonrise, knowing about me, hating me, fearing me, fearing Skene more — if he's double-crossed him — but not knowing just what to do about it. A man like a pressure bomb, waiting for the right moment to explode.

And, thought Barker, here am I, with my life hanging on a bloody great lie, and I've got to make it look good.

"Murnik," he said aloud, "many people come to Kirruk from all over Upper Mars. Is this not so?"

"Oh yes," said Murnik. "Even from the south they come, sometimes."

"Do they ever come from the north? True north, I mean, across the Bitter Sea?"

"Two, three, four times in a year. They come down from the Qed Range where the regular trading caravans never get, so they have to look out for themselves."

Barker said slowly, "Where would I get news of these people?"

"In the serais around the Northern Gate," said Murnik, "but unless it's necessary, I would tell you to leave them alone."

"Why?"

"Some of them are wild men.

Uncivilized. None of them like strangers. They stink like yents, and they prize their goods and their money very highly."

"In other words," said Barker, "they don't like thieves."

"I didn't expect them to like me," said Murnik. "What I objected to was the way they caught me. Easily! And I have spent seventeen years perfecting my craft."

"I'm sorry," said Barker, dryly. "But it is necessary to see them."

They walked toward the Northern Gate, and the last of the light went out like a blown candle, and it was night.

From the gate in the city wall a long winding trail led down and down to the sea bottom and snaked away between the white glimmer of the salt pans. You could just make out the line of it in the brilliant starshine. It was faint because few people travelled it. Inside the gate there were paddocks and the low, long buildings of several serais. Barker judged that they did not live on the business that came to them from the north.

The gatekeeper at the first serai sent them on to the very last one against the city wall.

"A caravan came in two weeks ago," he said. "They're still there, but I think you're too late for any trading."

"Well," said Barker, "I'll go and see."

He went on, with Murnik scuffling reluctantly beside him. "I can smell them already," the Martian said. "Phew!"

The serai smelled no worse to Barker than any of them did, having the characteristic but not unpleasant — once you were used to it — reek of animals and cooking and the smoke of dung-chip fires. The gatekeeper pointed to the western end of the low building. There was a big room there, piled all around the sides with loads of goods and packsaddles and harness. Nine or ten men were in it, squatting on their sleeping furs or hunched over the small fire that burned under a pot in the corner. They looked up as Barker and Murnik came in, and Barker saw what the Martian had meant. Some of them were the wildest-looking hillmen he had ever seen, peering at him with the suspicious hostility of so many animals.

Some of the others, though, looked more human, if no more friendly. Barker made the ritual gesture of courtesy between strangers, and said,

"Is there any man of you from Llona?"

There was a silence in the cold room, while the men stared at Barker. The whispering of the

dusty wind against the outer wall was clearly audible. Then a tall man stepped forward from between two others and said,

"We are from Llona."

He and his fellows were noticeably cleaner than the others, and their black eyes were bright and intelligent. They were rather handsome men, from what Barker could see of their faces between the hanging folds of their headdresses. Nevertheless, he did not warm to them.

"I am planning a caravan to go north," he said. "I need guides across the Bitter Sea and through the Qed. I will pay well."

Again silence, and the dark hostile staring.

Then the Llonan asked bluntly, "Why?"

Deliberately ignoring the question, Barker said, "I will also require guides from Llona northward. For these I will pay even better."

It was as though he had been in a church and spoken a blasphemy aloud. The Llonans cried out and made a sign to ward off evil, and the one who had spoken before said in a tone of horror,

"No one goes north from Llona. We do not even look in that direction, and when the wind blows we stop our ears lest forbidden sounds be brought to them."

Barker's pulses leaped in sudden excitement. "What is there in the north?"

"Something," said the Llonan, "which is better not aroused."

Suddenly he and his companions had stepped forward, and there were drawn daggers in their hands.

"I warn you," said the Llonan. "We will not guide you across the Bitter Sea, nor through the Qed, and if you live even so to reach Llona, we will kill you — so!"

He flung his dagger sharply down and it stuck quivering in the dirt floor, as in a man's heart.

CHAPTER IV

BESIDE SKENE, there were four Earthmen in the lamplit room of the tavern, sitting around a big table drinking the sour wine and considering their destinies. Barker watched them, and listened, and wondered.

Is he the man, he thought — Von Der Ahe with the rusty beard and the face like an underbred satyr, and the soft sweet voice?

Or is it Cline, the big man, big chested, big bellied, big spoken, with the little hard eyes showing nothing but greed?

Or is it the twins? Not birth-twins, of course, because their names are different and they are only superficially identical, but

true twins none the less. Ambrosia and Brancato, Brancato and Ambrosia. Pretty names. Graceful men, dark and slim and narrow-skulled, always alert, often smiling, brothers in the absolute enjoyment of evil.

Or Skene?

One of them. One of them hired two professional killers and sent them after Arrik, to take the secret of Chelorne out of him along with his life's blood.

I will find out which one of you, Barker thought. Then I will repay.

He glanced up suddenly, attracted by a movement in the shadows. But it was only Ylva. Barker thought she had been looking at him from the back room. Now she was going toward the stairs, her hips moving provocatively — probably they were always provocative, incapable of moving any other way whether she thought about it or not. She mounted the stairs and vanished in the upper dusk.

Von Der Ahe was speaking. "Of course, we only have Barker's word for it that he knows the way."

"That's right," said Skene.

"Yes," said Barker. "That's right. On the other hand, what can I gain by lying?"

"I don't know," said Von Der Ahe. "I only know that I learned one bit of wisdom at my mother's

knee, probably the only one I ever learned. And that is, never trust anybody."

Barker said, "I doubt if any of this fellowship is based on trust."

"No, by God," said Cline loudly. He looked around the table in hog-gish anger. "Some one of you sure figured a nice dirty double-cross. Latch onto this android thing all alone, and leave the rest of us out. Huh? Is that an honest way to treat friends? Is it? Is it?"

"Friends and brothers," said Von Der Ahe. "Earthmen all, a gallant little band, lost in sin on a strange world but bound together by ties stronger than those of blood. Christ. Shut up before you make me vomit."

Ambrosia said, "Barker could gain this by lying. He could make sure of getting the man who killed his friend by getting us all. He could lead us out to die in the desert."

"I could," said Barker. "But then I would die myself, and there's nothing in the debt-law that says I have to. I prefer to live. And I prefer even more to live rich. It'll take all of us working together to get to Chelorne, but a secret like that is worth so many millions that we won't even need to quarrel over the shares."

"If there is such a place," said Von Der Ahe. "And if there are

androids."

"My *remshi* saw them. He talked with them. And the way the Llonans acted when I mentioned going north is proof that *they* know something about it too."

"Then why don't they go and get all this wealth for themselves?" asked Ambrosia politely.

"How long have you been on Mars?" asked Barker.

"Five years — in the cities. Not long out here."

"I didn't think so. All right, I'll tell you. Fear, reverence, tabu, a superstitious horror of meddling with the great mysterious powers of the past. They look on their ancestors of Mars' golden age almost as gods, and what they did is holy. Every bit of scientific knowledge we've been able to dig out of the Martian past has been acquired over the most violent opposition. Of course the educated Martians don't feel that way, but unfortunately you don't deal with scholars and cosmopolites. You deal with the simple tribesmen who stick you with big knives if you tread on their beliefs. Does that answer your question?"

"I think we've chawed this over enough," said Skene. "There's only one hitch, and that's the guide situation. But that isn't too tough, at least as far as Llona. They can't stop us from following their cara-

van. And I reckon between us we can handle any trouble that comes up. I'd say it's time we vote and get things moving. Von?"

Von Der Ahe shrugged. "I can't go south. I might as well go north as sit in Kirruk getting old."

"Cline?"

"You bet"

"Ambrosia?"

Ambrosia opened his mouth, but he didn't have time to say anything. Suddenly from upstairs Ylva screamed.

THE MEN JUMPED UP, reaching for their guns. Barker could hear sounds of scuffling, short and sharp. Ylva called Skene's name once, followed by a couple of words that might have been *Look out* or *Help me*. Then she broke off with a yelp and was ominously quiet.

Skene ran for the stairs. Barker and Von Der Ahe went with him. Brancato and Ambrosia darted out the door into the street. Cline remained where he was in the middle of the room, swinging his head from side to side.

On the upper floor, someone ran lightly away.

Ylva was sitting in the doorway of a room at one side of the upstairs hall. Her eyes and her mouth were wide open and her arms were folded tight over her middle. Skene

spoke to her but she could not answer, and he ran on by with Von Der Ahe toward the back of the hall. Barker paused and bent over her. He thought at first she might have been stabbed, but there was no wound. Somebody had knocked the wind out of her. Barker gave her a reassuring word and went on.

Skene and Von Der Ahe had already climbed the ladder to the roof. He could hear them shouting to each other and to Brancato and Ambrosia in the street below. Apparently there was no one in sight. Barker stopped at the foot of the ladder and looked around. There were doorways, one at his right, two at his left, dark oblongs in the wavering lamplight. He listened, but he could not hear anything. The hangings in the doorway stirred in the cold draught from the roof.

On impulse he picked up an earthen lamp from a stand and entered the room on his right.

It was a sleeping chamber, frowsy and small. There was no one in it. Feet pounded back and forth on the roof overhead. Barker went back into the hall. The men outside were still shouting. Ylva had doubled up completely now with her head between her knees. Barker drew a deep breath and pulled aside the hanging of the first door

opposite him.

Almost at once he sensed that there was someone in the room. He lifted the lamp higher in one hand, his gun in the other. He looked around, trying to see the whole room at once. He saw shadowy corners, stacks of bales and casks, anonymous garments and materials hanging from pegs on the wall.

Then suddenly one of the hanging bundles of cloth sprang at him with such astounding speed and fury that he barely had time to see what was happening before the lamp was knocked out of his hand. He fired but the shot must have gone wild because the gun was struck away from him too by a blow that nearly broke his arm. He grappled in the pitch dark with a man muffled from head to toe in an enveloping cloak but not in the least hampered by it. Barker was neither especially huge nor especially powerful, but he had always found his lean wiry strength adequate for most occasions. It was not adequate for this one. He pounded his fists as upon a great rock, making no impression, and then a hand like a hammer came out of the dark and hit him alongside the ear and almost tore his head off. He fell like a dwindling candle down a long deep well, and as he fell he saw a tall dark shape go out the door. He heard sounds,

distant and hollow, without meaning. The well spun around and steadied again. He was on his hands and knees on the storeroom floor. His head rang like a flawed bell, and oil from the broken lamp had set fire to some of the garments that trailed down from the wall.

Barker had acquired a Martian horror of fire, constant nightmare of that waterless and wind-tormented world. He got up in a hurry and staggered around with dippers of sand from the emergency bin. Skene and Von Der Ahe came in to help him.

"Did you tangle with the guy?" asked Skene.

Barker said he had. "Couldn't see his face though."

"I know," said Skene sourly. "All wrapped up in a dark cloak. He went back downstairs and threw a knife into Cline's arm and then made it out through one of the back doors. Ambrosia says he saw somebody running down the alley, but he was going so fast he was gone before Ambrosia could get a shot at him."

"Maybe Ylva can tell us something now," said Von Der Ahe.

But she could not. She had come unexpectedly out of the room and seen a man bending over the top of the stairs, listening to what was being said below. He had turned and caught her, and she had

screamed. She had not seen his face.

"But he made me afraid," she said. "Really afraid."

"Why?"

"He was so—" She shivered and hesitated, and said at last, "—so strong."

"Yeah," said Barker. "I know. Well, now what?"

"There's only two explanations," Skene said. "Somebody wants to horn in, or somebody wants to stop us. Word gets around in Kirruk, and anybody fixing to go north would arouse a lot of curiosity. Either way, the hell with 'em. We're not going to change our plans."

"Our plans?" said Ambrosia.

"You were just going to vote yes weren't you?" Skene said.

Ambrosia smiled. He nodded.

"But always remember to ask me, Skene. That's all."

Punctiliously, Skene bowed and turned to Brancato. "Mr. Brancato?"

Brancato smiled and said yes.

CLINE, WHIMPERING over his cut arm that Ylva was rather perfunctorily bandaging, said, "Where's that hound-dog of yours, Skene? Murnik. He's supposed to keep this kind of thing from happening."

"You're supposed to be able to

protect yourself," said Skene disgustedly. "I sent him out. I was pretty sure how you were going to vote, so I told Murnik to get an outfit together in a hurry. He knows the right men. He figures," Skene continued, looking at his watch, "that we ought to be able to leave by mid-morning, or about three hours behind the Qed caravan we want to follow. So you better make up your bundles and get some sleep."

"That's what I like," said Von Der Ahe. "Get right with it. No dawdling around with second thoughts." He looked at Ylva. "Is she coming too?"

Skene laughed his hearty laugh. "Don't you worry about her, Von. She was born and raised on a yent's back and never slept under a roof until I got her."

"I wasn't worrying," said Von Der Ahe. "I was hoping she would come. These stinking deserts need something to dress them up. Good night."

He left, with Cline and the two dark men close behind him. Skene turned and looked at Barker.

"Well, you got it fixed. Are you happy?"

"I'm satisfied. And now the fun begins."

"Ah," said Skene. "You understand that?"

"Oh yes. The closer we come

to Chelorne the more greedy you'll all get, and you'll start making secret agreements and alliances among yourselves aimed at cutting down the number of people involved. And the one thing you'll all agree on is that I'm expendable—as soon as I've found the place."

Skene looked at him with a kind of admiration. Barker smiled, with absolutely no humor.

"Somewhere along the line," he said, "the man I'm looking for will give himself away. Can you imagine how he feels this minute, after all the trouble he went to get the secret for himself?"

"I can imagine," said Skene. "Listen, Barker—"

"Yes?"

"I hope you do know where Chelorne is, and I hope you find it. Because if you don't and if what Ambrosia said about you leading us all out to die in the desert is true, it won't do you one damn bit of good. You know why?"

"I can guess," said Barker.

"You don't have to guess, I'll tell you. Because you won't live long enough to know what did happen to the rest of us!"

He let that sink in, and then he laughed and said, "That's for then. For now, you sleep here tonight, where I can be sure you're safe. The boys have their orders, but

you can't always trust a man's good sense to guide him when he's got a powerful urge to do something. You'll find a bed in the last room down the hall. Good night."

Barker slept a light uneasy sleep full of unquiet dreams. He was awakened sharply by the sound of someone calling Skene's name in the hall, calling it urgently. He got up and looked out just as Skene pulled back the curtain of his sleeping room. The man who had done the calling was Murnik and he seemed very much upset.

"The Qed caravan is already gone," he said. "Hours ago. That must have been one of their men spying on us, and they don't intend to be followed."

Skene swore. But he said, "I don't see how they can stop us, even so. We can still catch up with 'em."

"Not unless we can leave the city," said Murnik.

"What do you mean, unless we can leave the city?"

"I mean that word has been sent all over Kirruk that you Earthmen are trying to do a forbidden thing. The streets are buzzing with it. If I hadn't already got the beasts and most of the supplies I wouldn't be able to get them now."

Skene roared up the hallway. "Barker!"

"I'm already up."

"Okay. We're going to get mov-

ing as soon as we can."

"It had better be soon," said Murnik darkly. "And even so, I think we're going to have to fight."

"All right," said Skene. "Damn it then, we'll fight!"

CHAPTER V

A FAINT GRAY PALLOR had begun to creep under the edge of night. The wind blew from the north, dry and freezing, plucking at cloaks and ruffling the thick rough hair of the animals, chilling ambition.

Barker settled himself on the saddle pad, finding the softest place on the yent's bone-ridged back. Up ahead of him he could see Skene and Ylva with Murnik. Beside him, Cline looked ridiculously top-heavy on his small short-legged mount. Brancato and Ambrosia brought up the rear with Von Der Ahe. There were seven baggage animals. They were going to have to do their own driving. Murnik had not been able to find any men willing to go north. It was a mark of his own corruption that he would go himself.

"All right," said Skene. "Let's go."

They began to move, slowly and jerkily at first, with kicks and thumps and profane urgings while the beasts made their ceremonial

protest. Gradually the pace quickened and they moved along the empty streets, between the dark walls of the houses. Barker could not see any signs of trouble yet. But he could feel them in the silence and smell them on the wind. This was the hour when fires were lit and men and beasts were fed and loads made ready so that the caravans might move with the first light. But nothing stirred. It was as though Kirruk slept. An Earthman might have believed it did. Neither a Martian nor a red-duster would. Barker caught Murnik's uneasy eye and nodded, making sure his gun was free under the folds of his cloak.

The Llonans, he thought, had meant what they said. He was positive now that the spy was one of them, making sure of the outlanders' intentions and then taking pains to block them. They believed strongly in some ancient menace north of them, beyond the passes of the Qed. They were apparently determined that it should not be disturbed. Barker sniffed the air and shivered, feeling that this was only the beginning of trouble.

The little file of men and animals turned into the wide way that led to the Northern Gate. And now the wind came at them straight as a spear shaft across the Bitter Sea. The serais here were quiet too.

Barker looked ahead, squinting against the dust that came whirling and skirling down the street, salt-dust, alkali-dust, sea-bottom and dead earth dust, stinging, corrosive. It was a little lighter now. He could see a humped irregular mass clotted around the gate as though objects of various colors had blown there in an eddy of the wind. But he knew that they were not objects. They were men.

Murnik, at the head of the line, flung up his hand and turned to speak to Skene, pointing ahead. The caravan halted.

Cline said suddenly, "I can't fight with my arm the way it is. You're going to have to close up and cover me."

Von Der Ahe laughed. He said, "I've had worse cuts than that shaving. Cover yourself."

Cline opened his mouth again and Barker told him to shut up. They were talking up ahead and he wanted to hear what was said.

"No Earthman has any business this way," a man in a striped robe was saying. "Go south. Go east or west, and no one will stop you. But not north."

"We go to trade," said Murnik, wheedling. "Would you take the bread from our mouths? What evil voice have you listened to?"

"The voice of truth. Listen, thief. Tell your Earthmen that we have

permitted them to stay here, knowing what kind of men they were. They may stay, or they may go—but not to the north.”

The group shifted and stirred, with a clinking of arms. The brightening gray of the dawn gleamed in their eyes.

Skene spoke briefly to Murnik. Then he shrugged as though he had accepted the ultimatum. The head of the caravan turned and doubled back upon itself, so that for a moment the men were pretty well bunched together. Murnik alternately cursed the beasts and lifted his voice in furious reproach against the crowd, which had broken its solid ranks now, instinctively following the retrograde motion of the caravan.

“Dig ’em in,” said Skene under his breath. “Let’s show the bastards.”

Barker said rapidly, “Skene, if we kill any of these men we can never come back here or to any other North Mars city. Notch your guns back to stun, only.”

Skene nodded understanding. “All right, do it,” he told the others. And then he said, “Now!”

HE DROVE HIS HEELS into the sides of his mount. The beasts leaped forward, and Skene shouted. Murnik voiced the high shrill drover’s yell that warns the

yents to move fast because of danger, and Barker took it up. He kicked his own mount into a rapid gallop and the head of the caravan came around again in a swiftly accelerating circle, snapped out straight like a whiplash, and raced headlong directly at the gate.

The sheer mass of the crowd might have stopped them if it had still been solid. But the men had moved and scattered, and the yents charged through them, urged on by that demoniac cry. Men reached out their hands to grasp and stab. Barker knocked one aside with his clubbed gun, and kicked another under the jaw, and then a third one had caught his bridle and was bracing himself to twist the yent’s head and throw it down. Barker shouted at the man but he turned up a snarling face and called Barker a name, and wrenched the beast’s head farther around.

Barker triggered his gun and the stunning charge knocked the man back unconscious and the yent stumbled past him. Cline blundered by, howling something about getting the goddam gate open. Murnik was struggling with the bars of the gate while Skene and Von Der Ahe fired their stun-guns into the dust cloud which was rapidly obscuring all but the closest details of the fight.

Ylva was crouched in her saddle,

her eyes flaming and her hair blown wild, screaming desert insults at the men of the town. The pack animals were going crazy. Barker shouted to Ambrosia, "Catch the leader there or they'll bolt." He spurred forward himself and grasped the dangling lead rope, and Ambrosia turned from fighting, his eyes blank and bright with passion. He reached out and took the beast's halter from the other side. Then the gate was open and they went through it flying, kicking up a mighty dust, the splayed feet of the yents pounding a muffled drumbeat. And now Ylva was joining in the cry to halloo them on. They went down the winding track that dropped along the cliffs, stringing out because there was not room to go abreast, sliding around the turns at breakneck speed.

The track flattened out between the harsh white areas of the salt-pans. The beasts would run now until they were blown, and they let them. The salt-pans fell behind and the track faded out and vanished in the shifting dunes. Barker looked back. Tiny human figures, some mounted and some not, were dotted all the way down the cliffs and out onto the beginning of the desert, but they had stopped following.

Barker felt a strong relief that

they had got out without killing anybody. He thought that the men with him were men who killed easily, and that they would not have refrained but for the knowledge that they might indeed have to come back this way. Even as it was, Barker foresaw a rough reception if they came back to Kirruk.

He wondered if any of them would come back at all. He stopped wondering, and pulled the end of his cloak tighter across his face against the evil dust of the Bitter Sea, and settled himself to ride.

And ride and ride, endlessly, into the north.

"They can't be that far ahead of us," said Skene on the second day. He was using field glasses. They had stopped on the crest of a rock ridge. The yents were nosing around in search of moss and lichens and the men sat or stood in various attitudes of weariness. Ahead where Skene was looking the sea-bottom sloped away in a great bowl, across which nothing moved.

"We've pushed the animals right off their feet," said Skene, "and we've hardly stopped long enough to eat. We should have caught up with 'em by now."

Murnik opened his mouth and then shut it again carefully. But Barker laughed.

"What's funny?" demanded

Skene.

"You. All of you. What you call a brutal day's ride wouldn't tire a nomad's baby, let alone his yent. Isn't that so, Ylva?"

The girl looked at him, stonily at first and then breaking almost reluctantly into a grin. She nodded.

Von Der Ahe walked up and thrust his face close to Barker's. His beard and his eyebrows and his hair were full of gritty dust. He was not in a good humor.

"That sounds to me," he said, "a lot like an insult. I think you're a big bag of wind, Mr. Barker. More than that, I think you're a liar. I don't think you know a damn bit better where Chelorne is than the rest of us."

Brancato, Cline and Ambrosia gathered and stood beside Von Der Ahe, glaring at Barker.

Barker said, "Unless you get the lead out of your pockets it won't matter whether I do or not. That caravan's halfway to the Qed by now. If we can't catch them, or at least pick up their trail, we're going to have the devil's own time to find our way across the desert, to say nothing about the mountains."

SKENE SHOULDERED his way in between Barker and the others. He looked angry, but he said, "Hold it now. We got bigger

things to do than fight. Murnik, is that true? Can we make better time?"

Murnik said, "I can, and Barker can, and Ylva can. About the others I don't know. It depends on them."

He tactfully avoided mentioning Skene, who said, "They'll make it. Because if they fall by the wayside they'll stay there, alone. And we got no water to spare. Mount up. We're going to catch that caravan."

And now they rode longer and harder across a nightmare of walking dunes and dust-clouds and rock-formations like old worn-down teeth that could still tear at them, past the edges of bottomless cracks and into deeper and deeper valleys. They held north as well as they could, but their path was governed by the terrain and as often as not they were going any way but the way they wanted. They made time. But they did not find any trace of the caravan. As long as they avoided falling into crevices they could keep blundering on indefinitely, as far as that part of it went. But in the desert time is figured in water-skins, and a path that saves even a single day can make the difference between living or dying.

The men became more short-tempered and quarrelsome as their saddle-sores and aching backs grew worse. Barker rode with the slack-

jointed ease of a native, and watched, and waited.

The Bitter Sea was as large and empty as the sky. At first it seemed merely uncaring. But as time went on Barker began to feel in it a baleful purpose. He began to think that it resented the random movements, the wastefulness and noise of the living things that toiled across it. He thought that it would like to enforce upon them the quiet perfection of death.

"We lost too much time," Mur-nik said. "We'll never catch them now."

"Well, we can't go back," said Skene. "So don't anybody mention it." And he cut the water-ration again.

One afternoon there was a blue shadow in the north like cloud on the horizon. "The Qed," said Barker. "There it is."

They spurred the yents on, making the last lap in a staggering run, men and beasts together gaunt with thirst. But the blue shadow retreated before them and at sunset they were still in the desert. The low light, striking level on the distant mountains, turned them into solid forms of red and ocher rock, suddenly deceptively close. Skene stopped and yanked out his glasses.

Even without them, Barker's desert-accustomed eyes could make

out a string of dark dots, infinitely tiny, moving up into a fold between the cliffs.

"There's your caravan," he said.

Skene watched until the dots were out of sight, and Barker knew that he was memorizing the position of the pass. Then he laughed and put the glasses away and said,

"We made it. And they showed us the pass after all."

"You made it this far," said Barker. "There's a long way yet to go."

They went on until it was too dark to go any farther and made camp in a stand of rocks, fantastically worn by wind and water but blessedly solid after the sliding sand. They shared out the last of the water and settled themselves to rest until moonrise, leaving Von Der Ahe on watch.

Barker climbed a little higher into the tangle of rocks and found a hollow to guard his back. He went to sleep with his hand on his gun and a tight warm feeling in the nerves that did not let him slip too far into the abyss of exhaustion.

He woke abruptly, without knowing what had wakened him. The nearer moon had just risen, casting a faint white light over the desert and the twisted rock formations. He could not see Von Der Ahe at first, and then he located

him, sitting with his head bent forward on his knees, obviously asleep. Barker shook his irritated contempt and started to get up. Then he happened to look over Von Der Ahe and the sleeping camp, into the moon-washed desert.

Something moved.

CHAPTER VI

SHAPES.

Man-sized, man-formed, but too fleet, too light-running and swift-leaping to be men.

White shapes, naked as marble, with stark pure limbs against the night, gleaming in moonlight.

Shapes, surrounding the camp.

Barker's flesh turned cold under his warm robe and his heart began a frantic pounding. He was afraid. He started to cry a warning and fear stopped his throat so that he could not make a sound. Then one of the yents bawled in the picket line and Barker got his breath and yelled.

The men sprang up out of sleep, grabbing for their guns and demanding to know what the hell. Barker said, "Out there! Out there." And Ylva made a shrill wailing noise and fell to her knees.

The men swore and then were quiet for a few seconds, huddled together, watching the graceful and incredible beings that ran to-

ward them in the moonlight.

Then Murnik said, "The men of Chelorne." His voice sounded very strange. "The androids."

"Don't fire," said Barker. "Don't shoot at them."

"Why not?" demanded Von Der Ahe, but Skene said,

"He's right. Time enough for that if they attack us. Let's see what they want. Murnik—"

"No," said Murnik. "No, not me."

"Ylva—no. All right, Barker then. You speak Martian better than any of us, and I don't want any misunderstandings. Go ahead—or are you Martian enough to choke on your superstition?"

"Yes," said Barker. "I am." But he stepped forward and called out to the men of Chelorne giving them the greeting between strangers.

"We come in peace," he shouted.

The white shapes paused. It was hard to count them. Eight, ten, he was not sure. He saw now that some of them carried burdens.

One of them answered in a clear voice, "We also come in peace. We bring water."

"Hey," said Skene. "Water! Tell 'em to come on in."

But they were already moving again, closing their ring tighter around the camp. The coldness remained on Barker's flesh. He muttered, "Be careful. Be very

careful what you do."

Ylva had crept into a crevice of the rocks and was huddled there, peering out with eyes as bright and frightened as those of a fox-whelp cornered by dogs. Murnik was standing close to Barker. There was something curiously rigid in the way he stood. His breathing was harsh, clearly audible.

The men of Chelorne came on, and now Barker could see that they were neither men nor humans. Their bodies were perfectly molded but sexless, like the bodies of idealized statues, unnaturally beautiful. They had no navels. They had no body hair. But the hair of their heads was long and fine and their faces, in the dim moonlight, had a cold nobility.

The Earthmen stood in a little bunch and quivered in the eagerness of their greed, a powerful greed only slightly tinged with awe. This made all the hardships worth while. From this moment on as long as they lived nothing would stop them, not fear nor danger nor common sense, certainly not decency. The androids existed. Chelorne existed. The last small barrier of doubt was gone.

The androids stopped not fifteen feet away among the twisted rocks. Those that had carried water skins laid them down. And the leader said,

"We give you a choice. Take this water and go in peace, back across the desert to Kirruk. Or continue through the Qed and die."

Skene stepped forward, pushing Barker aside. "But," he said, in his barbarous Martian, "We're peaceful traders. We mean no harm. We only want—"

"You are thieves and renegades, outcasts from your own people, Martian and Earthman alike. You intend to rape Chelorne."

He raised his hand. He must have been carrying some small weapon concealed there because a sudden beam of light no thicker than a pencil shot from it and touched a pinnacle of rock above them. Almost instantly it became molten and began to drip like a guttering candle. There were several sharp breaths drawn and uneasy words spoken. Then the beam flicked off and the android said quietly,

"That is how you will die if you pass the Qed."

HE TURNED AND RAN lightly away, and the others followed him, white and swift in the moonlight. Von Der Ahe made a tentative motion of lifting his gun and Skene knocked it down.

"You want to get us burned?" he said. "Don't be a fool. Don't be a crazy fool, Von. Let them go."

Let them think *we're* going, too—back the way they want us to.” He began to laugh. There was an edge in his laughter, something as dangerous as a tiger’s cough. Barker’s nerves tightened, and tightened again. He stepped delicately away from Skene, desiring room.

Ylva cried, “No, no, you can’t do it!”

But Skene ignored her. “We’ll let them get ahead of us, but not too far. And then we’ll follow the tracks they leave straight to Chelorne.”

He looked at Barker, and Von Der Ahe looked at Barker, and Von Der Ahe said,

“That’s better than taking someone’s word for it.”

Ylva came up to Skene. She caught his shirt front in her two hands and shouted, “Didn’t you see what they did to that rock? Didn’t you see what they were? Do you still think you can steal from a race of demons?”

He hit her with the kind of detached impatience a man uses on an annoying little dog that snaps at his ankles. She bent to one side and away, holding her face between her hands, her black hair tumbling down to hide her. Skene was still looking at Barker.

“What do you say to that, Barker?” he asked. “Do you still think we need you?”

“You might,” said Barker. “What if you lose the tracks?”

“Yes,” said Ambrosia. “What if the wind comes up?”

“Why are you in such a rush, anyway?” asked Barker. “Plenty of time to kill me when you get there. Unless you have a special reason.”

Skene smiled. “Let’s load up the water-skins and get going. Murnik? Murnik!”

“He’s gone,” said Cline.

They looked around, and in a moment they saw Murnik at the end of the picket line. He had loaded one beast with food and one of the water skins and was starting to saddle another. Skene shouted at him but he paid no attention, working with great haste.

The men moved to the picket line. “Get busy,” Skene said. “Look at Murnik. He can’t wait.”

Murnik jammed the bridle over the yent’s nose and swung up onto its back. He leaned over and caught the lead-rope of the pack animal.

“I’m going back,” he said. “The rest of you can do what you please, but I know when I’ve gone far enough.”

“They frightened you,” said Skene.

“They did. Ylva’s right. The men of Llona were right. It’s madness to tamper with — with

things we don't understand."

Almost, thought Barker, he had said forbidden things.

"I need you," said Skene. "There'll be fighting and we're few enough as it is."

"No. I've done everything you wanted me to, Skene. But not this."

"Well," said Skene, "if you're that yellow-bellied you wouldn't be any use anyway. Go on."

Murnik reined the yent around and faced him toward the south and Kirruk. He rode three paces and then another, and then Skene shot him. He had his gun notched up to the highest power, and the blast drilled right through Murnik's back.

"I'm sorry," said Skene. "I can't spare all that water."

Murnik fell off onto the ground and lay there and somebody caught the animals. Then Murnik turned his head slowly toward Skene, and said huskily,

"You swine! I tortured that man to death to get you this secret and this is what you do." His eyes, already filming over, sought Barker. "Kill him, Earthman. For your *remshi*—"

But Barker was already moving.

He hit Skene from the side, knocking his gun away, and they fell rolling among the legs of the

beasts. The yents kicked and danced, raising a great bawling and threatening to break the picket line. Barker didn't care. He didn't care about anything but Skene. Skene was heavier than Barker, and he was strong, but Barker had a fury in him bigger than anything Skene could muster up. He had carried it all the way from the blood-stained room in Ganshaw and now it was loose. He had Skene under him in the dust. He saw his face in the moonlight and he beat it with his fists and never felt where Skene's blows raked him or the feet of the frightened beasts stumbled over him. He got Skene's powerful neck between his hands and held onto it, thinking of Arrik's body and being sorry Murnik was so easily dead. "Where's the other one?" he asked. "The man I saw in Ganshaw? Where is he so I can kill him after I'm done with you?"

Skene's eyes stared up at him and his tongue stuck out between his teeth, but he didn't answer. He couldn't answer. And then Ambrosia came in neatly from behind, between the animals, and hit Barker on the back of the neck. He was very careful not to hit him too hard. Ambrosia was a careful man and did not like to throw a thing away until he was sure he had no more use for it. So Barker was partially consci-

ous again by the time they had finished tying him up, and completely conscious before they had got the beasts half loaded.

He was lying where they had dragged him, at one end of the picket line out of the way in a hollow between the humpy rocks. His head ached, but he could see and hear and make sense out of it. They had put Murnik somewhere out of the way too. Skene sat apart, not helping with the loading. He had a flask in his hand and from time to time he took sips out of it, and then fought painfully for breath, rubbing his neck. Barker smiled viciously, hoping his throat would swell shut and strangle him completely.

But it didn't, and Skene could talk. In a hoarse whisper, he was fighting with the others.

"— don't need him any more. Why the hell drag him along — just so he can shoot me in the back?"

"I don't give a damn if he does," said Cline. "You deserve it. Trying to hold out on us and cheat us all the way you did — and you still would if you could. I want to be sure we find the place."

"Ah," said Skene, "he's lying. He never knew where it was."

"How do you know that?" asked Brancato.

"I got a little sense, that's how.

Anyway, know it or not, we don't need him now! All we got to do is follow the androids."

Ambrosia said, as he had before, "Suppose we lose their tracks?"

"Then," said Von Der Ahe, "we find them again. I say kill him. He's honest, and an honest man is always a danger. You never know what they're going to do."

"That's right, Von," Skene said. "You've got it by the right tail. Listen—"

He went on haranguing them while they made the loads fast. The farther moon slid up over the horizon, adding more light and a double shadow. And someone came creeping quietly between the rocks toward Barker.

It was Ylva, and she had a knife.

CHAPTER VII

SHE HAD COME SO QUIETLY that she was almost beside him before he saw her. He opened his mouth to yell but she put her hand over his lips, shaking her head fiercely. He relaxed then and she began to slash at the thongs that held him. The men were still busy with their loading and wrangling. In a minute Barker was free.

Ylva crept away out of sight behind a tilted slab of rock, and Barker followed her. Neither spoke.

They concentrated on moving without sound until the voices of the men had grown somewhat fainter. Then when they felt a little safer Barker whispered the Martian equivalent of Thanks.

"My life is yours."

Her eyes blazed with a savage light. He thought he could make out the dark bruise on her cheek where Skene had struck her.

"I wish you had killed him," she said.

"I tried."

"I am Martian," she said, speaking very rapidly and very low, in a shaking fury. "I am not to be beaten like an animal, and I am not to forget it when Martians are tortured and killed because of an Earthman's greed. You are not like the others, Colin Barker. I will go with you."

"Good," said Barker, and held up his hand. "Sh-h! Listen."

Somebody had discovered that he was missing. There was a good deal of shouting back and forth and presently Skene began to bellow hoarsely for Ylva.

Barker touched her arm and they scuttled farther in among the rocks. The formation was not endless in extent and it was out of the question to hide in it and not be found. Five active men could search very thoroughly in a short space of time.

Barker stopped and listened care-

fully a long minute to the voices. Then he said to Ylva,

"We'll need yents and supplies. I'll try and circle back to the picket line. You go on, right to the edge of the rocks. I'll come round for you. Oh, and I'll need your knife. They took mine. You don't have a gun, do you?"

She did not, but she gave him the knife and slipped away. Barker turned and began to circle to his right cursing the moonlight.

Still, it made the shadows blacker. He lay in a pool of them with his face covered, while Cline went by not ten feet away. He had the advantage of these men in desert craft. They were hard men in their own world, but this was not it. He listened to their voices and their footsteps and was careful, and he made it back to where the animals were tethered.

They were all loaded up and saddled now. He could not see anybody near them, but he was cautious even so, keeping in the shadows, looking and listening. He would have made a full circuit of the area from the back if he had had time, but he did not have time. Ylva must be very close by now to the edge of the desert.

He took the inevitable chance and raced toward the picket line.

The first shot was so close that its blast made a smoking hole in

his cloak. He sprang forward and fell, rolling — for the second time that night — under the legs of the animals, and the second shot was a deliberate miss, just to make sure the first one had been heard. Von Der Ahe came out from a crevice he had been using for a sentry box. Damn him, thought Barker. *This* time he wouldn't be asleep on watch. He slashed at the reins knotted on the long picket rope, and Von Der Ahe sauntered toward him smiling, waiting for the clear shot he knew he was going to get when he could hit Barker without killing any of the precious animals.

Expertly, Barker threw the knife.

VON DER AHE FIRED once more by sheer reflex, but he was already falling backward and the blast went high. Barker had a brief glimpse of Von Der Ahe dropping the gun and lifting both hands to the haft of the knife that stood out just under the jut of his red beard. Then Von Der Ahe was down and Barker was mounting and riding, leading one pack animal and a mount for Ylva.

Men were already appearing in answer to Von Der Ahe's shots, running in and out among the rocks. Barker kicked his mount hard to make it go but he did not dare to stampede the brutes until

he had picked up Ylva. He was sorry that he had not had time to free all the yents and run them away from the picket line. He began to look for Ylva.

It seemed a million years and twice that many miles around the island of rocks until he saw her. He pulled the yents up in a cloud of dust and held them while she ran to meet him and jumped up onto the saddle pad.

And it almost worked.

Barker thought it had. He said to Ylva, "Now we go!" He opened his mouth to give the stampede cry. But his beast screamed and gave a great leap, and in the same instant he heard a crackling gun-blast and saw the stocky figure of a man standing high among the rocks — Skene, who had figured what he was up to and made it to a vantage point in time.

The wounded yent ran. Wildly, blindly, dying on its feet, it took Barker into the desert and there was nothing he could do to stop it. Long before he had gathered himself to jump, Ylva's mount had been shot in its tracks. He let go, taking a jarring but calculated fall in the loose sand and the yent ran on.

In the distance Barker saw Skene come down out of the rocks and go toward Ylva. He had apparently decided that two yents were worth

sacrificing for her. He picked her up out of the dust half stunned and Barker saw him strike her repeatedly. A hot rage rose in him for Ylva's sake and was joined to what he already felt for Arrik. He started to get up with some crazy idea of running back and tackling Skene, but Cline and the twins came galloping up, leading a mount for Skene. They stood around for a minute or two, apparently arguing. Cline kept pointing toward the Qed as though insisting that if they didn't go now they would never find the trail of Chelorne. Lying still, Barker could see them peering out across the moon-shot, shadow-checked desert. But he was indistinguishable from any surrounding hump of sand or rock, and the dust the dying animal was raising in its headlong flight was far away. He thought probably no one had noticed when he jumped, and would figure that a man alone in the desert with no water was as good as dead anyway. He thought probably they would not take the time to hunt for him.

They did not. Skene mounted and pulled Ylva up with him. One of them led the pack animal. They rode away around the rocks, back to the picket line for the rest of the caravan.

Lying in the dust and the bitter cold, Barker thought that they

were right. A man alone in the desert without water *was* as good as dead.

He stood up. Tears of sheer anger and frustration came into his eyes. He shook his fist at the place where Skene and his party had disappeared, and he cursed them into the empty wind. It was a childish thing to do but he felt better after he had done it. He walked back toward the rocks, keeping them between himself and the distant Qed.

When he reached them and worked his way across to the other side the black moving dots of the caravan were already far off and going fast, to make up for the time they had wasted. For a moment Barker was gripped by an insane impulse to run after them shouting. But it was only an impulse and quite futile anyway, since they could not possibly have heard him. It was only that the desert looked so huge and lonely, the worn humped masses of the distant Qed so utterly and cruelly barren, the Martian sky so alien. And this was unexpected, because he could hardly remember the sky of Earth.

Von Der Ahe's body lay where it had fallen. The knife was still in its throat. Barker retrieved it, thinking with cold distaste that he had had too much to do with knives lately. They had taken

Von Der Ahe's gun. Barker went looking for Murnik and found him tossed away like a bundle of old clothes behind a rock. They had taken his gun too, but they hadn't bothered with the knife. Earthmen were largely gunfighters, when they fought, or else they used their fists. The knife was a Martian weapon. Barker took it. He did not bother to take the leather water-bottle Murnik carried. It was empty like his own. There had been no time to refill them from the new skins.

There was nothing else to be done, so Barker began to walk in the track of the caravan, toward the pass of the Qed.

MORNING OVERTOOK HIM long before he reached it. All that day he climbed, out of the great basin of the sea bottom and up into the arid waste of crumbling rock that must once in a younger time have been a green coastal range, beautiful above surf and blue water. The wind had drifted the tracks of the caravan, but they were still discernible in the sheltered places. Once in a while he could even see the imprint of a naked foot. He would remember the uncanny visitors of the night and shiver, wondering what lay ahead. After a while it began to seem to him that the androids

deliberately had made their trail obvious and enduring, so that if the Earthmen did decide to follow they would not have any trouble doing it.

Barker climbed through narrow ways between walls of red and yellow stone. The wind went with him, cold and thin, and all the edges of the rock were worn and the surface crumbled where you touched it, into dry sand. And this was the pass where Arrik had met those damned three strangers that had started it all.

Night came and he was still going, but he was only sure of it at intervals. Thirst had become a giant that outweighed hunger and weariness together, and the three of them were a crushing weight on his back. But there were some people ahead of him he had to catch, and one of them was a girl with black eyes to whom he had once said, *My life is yours*. He kept on, and never knew he was through the pass until he came right onto the village.

He leaned in the darkness against a fragment of cold stone wall and gathered his wits together with a forcible effort. This must be Llona, the village toward which Arrik had been heading when the yellow wind caught him—the village where the men lived who had threatened to kill him back in Kirruk if he ever came there.

Llona. Yes. We will kill you, so, the Llonans had said, and the knife stuck quivering in the floor.

The village was dark now. It was small, a hunch of stone houses on a broad ledge above the valley. Probably once there had been vineyards here, and fields below on either side of a river. Now there was rock and desert and a tiny patch of irrigated land. Houses and stable-sheds stood in a haphazard square around an open space, and in the middle of the space there was the coping of a well. Barker's very bones yearned within him at the thought of water.

Llona dominated the pass, and he wondered if they had tried to stop the caravan. He had not heard any shots, and there were no signs of violence. Remembering how the Llonans had reacted to even the unspoken idea of Chelorne, he imagined that they remained indoors with their shutters barred when the androids were abroad.

He looked out over the valley, squinting his eyes in the moonlight, and he thought he saw a little string of dots just at the edge of vision, moving where the dry valley opened out into some vaster space beyond.

He could easily get past Llona himself now. All he had to do was go on. But there didn't seem to be much point in that. He could

not go any farther on foot, and he could not go any farther anyway without food and water. He might as well get himself decently killed in Llona as perish from thirst and exhaustion in the valley. With any luck — well, let's face it, with an enormous amount of luck — he might be able to steal the supplies he had to have, without getting caught.

He let go of the wall and went quietly, very quietly, into the dark village.

CHAPTER VIII

HE MADE IT TO THE WELL. He took the twisted rope in his hand and let the leather bucket down slowly, slowly, and drew it up again the same way, whispering to it, pleading with it not to clatter against the side of the well. Drops of water splashed with beautiful little wet noises. He got the bucket onto the coping and put his arms around it and thrust his face down into it and drank, sobbing and sucking in a sort of blind ecstasy.

Then he became more cautious. He crouched down beside the coping where he would not be so readily seen, and filled his leather bottle. The village was utterly still. It might have been deserted. A yent snorted and stamped in the stable

and the sound was terrifying.

He drank again until he was afraid to drink any more, and replaced the bucket exactly where he had found it. The next thing was food.

The staples of Martian diet are dried meat and a kind of hard bread. Bread he would have to do without, but in any Martian village thin strips of meat are usually drying on an open rack. Barker looked around for a rack and did not see one, and rose to hunt for it, driven by pangs he could not ignore.

He had barely reached the shelter of the stable wall when a door opened, spilling lamplight across the square. A man and two women came out of the house and walked to another house and went in. There were voices, and then the closing of the second door shut them off and it was quiet again. But now Barker knew that the village was not asleep.

He hesitated, thinking that he should steal a yent and go without pushing his luck any farther. But he had to have food. He crept along by the stable wall, and then from shadow to shadow behind the horses. He saw the squat granary first, and then the drying-rack beside it, set in the open where the edge of the shelf on which Llona was built jutted out

over the valley. He was closer now to the houses at the inner end of the square, where the three people had gone from one door to another. He could hear a sound as of a number of people talking. But there was no one in sight and he thought he could make it.

He did. The rack was about four feet high and quite long. It was hung with thin strips of yent meat, already fairly dry. Barker began to grab with both hands, cramming his pockets.

Abruptly, with the unthinking quickness of the hunted animal, he dropped into the barred shadow under the rack and lay still.

On the square a door had opened again, releasing a flood of light and a sound of voices.

From where he lay he could see between two houses into the square. He could see the door. It was the one the man and the two women had entered. Now they were coming out again, and twenty or thirty others with them. He did not see any children. Martian communities customarily keep their children hidden from strangers because of the prevalence of child-stealing. The Martian birth-rate is low, and children precious. But it struck Barker as odd that under the circumstances now there was no sign nor sound of a child. The men and women talked in grave tones,

and that was odd too, because he could not distinguish the voices of the women from those of the men.

The man and the two women flung off their headdresses and their robes and stripped, the man his tunic, the women their gowns. They stood forth naked in the moonlight and the bitter wind. And Barker, under the drying rack, hugged closer to the unyielding rock and froze to his very bowels with a cold that had nothing to do with the Martian night.

The man and the two women were neither men nor women. They were all alike, three white and perfect bodies without sex, without fear or passion, without love.

A second man and a third woman stepped forward, and stripped, and joined them. And now they were five, with the sham of manhood and womanhood shed with the pretense of humanity, in five heaps of castoff clothing on the ground.

They turned and ran swiftly out of Llona.

And Barker thought, Good God, *these* are the androids!

No wonder they did not encourage visitors. No wonder the Llona he had fought in the store-room of the Kirruk inn was strong.

No wonder there were no children.

MEN AND WOMEN STANDING in a village square, talking, picking up garments from the ground and folding them. Men and women living in houses, going through all the motions, preparing food and perhaps even eating it — what was their metabolism, really? Chemical? And was that why they traded their handicrafts to the people on the other side of the Qed, with the vast mineral deposits of the sea-bottom to draw from? Men and women growing grain and tending beasts, a remote and unwelcoming but perfectly normal village to anyone who happened to come by it, human beings in a human world, trading as far away as Kirruk, and who would suspect? Who would know that the men of Llona and the men of Chelorne were one and the same, and not men at all? Not human at all?

No one. And so they could for centuries have guarded their secret and the road to Chelorne. And if anyone came too close and was too stubborn, the androids, the men of Chelorne, would appear and lead them on past the innocent village with the innocent men and women in it, to — what?

Certainly not to Chelorne.

To death, then, in the trackless desert.

Barker lay on his belly on the cold stone and watched and was

afraid to breathe lest their keen unhuman ears should hear it.

The androids dispersed after a while, going into their separate houses, and the square was empty and the lights were out. But it was a long time before Barker found the courage to move. He did not suppose that they slept like people, and he pictured them inside the quiet houses always alert, engaged in some secret activity that only they knew about.

It wasn't any good just lying there though, waiting for the sun to come up. Finally he crawled from under the rack, moving with excruciating care and slowness, and began to work his way back toward the stables. It seemed to him that he moved with a sound of drums and thunder, and that not only Llona but the villages on the other side of the Qed must hear him. Actually he went like a shadow, and the minutes that dragged out into hours were only minutes.

He got back to the stables and inside them, and no door opened and no face appeared to look after him. The stables had a comforting warmth and a faintly ammoniac but pleasant smell of animals and dry fodder. Barker saddled the handiest yent as fast and as quietly as he could and led it out.

Llona was still dark and undis-

turbed. He led the beast out into the narrow track where it followed the slope down into the valley. Then he mounted and rode fast away from there.

The yent was fresh and the two moons gave plenty of light now. Barker was out of the valley by sunrise and well into the plain beyond. The tracks of Skene's caravan were still faintly — very faintly — visible in the dust. This was true desert, not sea-bottom. The dessicated soil was rust-red and ochre-yellow, wandering where the wind took it. The wind was not doing much of anything with it now, and Barker looked uneasily at the sky. When the wind blows, the Martian proverb says, the wise man travels. When it stops, he looks for shelter.

Barker looked, but he could not see anything but desert. The sky had a peculiar shimmer to it low down. The faint track went on and on ahead of him. There were fresher prints mixed with the faded yent tracks, the prints of human-like bare feet. Last night's swift-runners from the village of the not-men, going to make sure of the kill.

Barker kicked the yent on as hard as he dared, and it seemed willing to go, raising its head from time to time to snuff the air and snort with a kind of authori-

tative wisdom. The wind dropped to a dead flat calm and the shimmer around the horizon increased.

About midmorning he saw some things lying on the ground far off. He thought at first they were bodies, but when he came up to them he saw that they were water-skins, as many as the androids had brought to them, slashed open and empty. There were signs that the caravan had stopped here to rest. Probably the men had slept, and the androids would have had no trouble slipping into the camp to take away what they had given.

He went on. And now his yent was tired and stubborn, and it kept fighting him to go off to the left, away from the caravan track. And Barker was tired too, so tired that he kept falling asleep without knowing it or bothering to shut his eyes. And the sun wore a nimbus of dingy yellow, and the desert was very still.

TOWARD NOON HE SAW something small and distant come crawling over the top of a red dune. He rode toward it and it saw him coming and stopped. It was Cline. Somebody had burned a hole through him and he was so nearly dead already that there was nothing Barker could do. He cried for water and Barker gave him some, and Cline said,

"Ambrosia shot me, and you know why? Because my yent stumbled into his and he got thrown. He shot the yent too. And then they just took my water bottle and went on."

"Where are they?" asked Barker. "How far ahead?"

But Cline only shook his head and asked for water again and muttered about the androids.

"Skene thought he was so god-damn smart. Follow them to Chelorne. Just wondering, that's all. But you know where Chelorne is, Barker. You'll take us there, you and me, and we'll have it all—"

He still had the look of greed on his face when he died.

Barker left him there. There was no need to bury him, even if he had wanted to. The wind would do that for him, soon enough.

The yellow haze over the sun had deepened to an ugly copper color, and now there was the beginning of a sound, very large and deep, still many miles away but coming fast. The yent had to be beaten to make it go the way he wanted. Barker forced it to the top of the highest ground he could find and looked out desperately over the darkling plain, knowing that there was not much time left to him.

He saw a dead yent lying on the rusty ground perhaps a quarter

of a mile away. There was a trampled area around it and then the track went on from it, but with an increasing uncertainty, changing direction now this way and now that. From this height, and in the unnatural stillness, Barker could see everything as clearly as though it were drawn on a sheet of paper. Of the androids themselves there was no sight, but their separate and single tracks lay out in a kind of fan-shaped maze, leading everywhere and nowhere, and the broad track of the caravan was almost pathetic in its windings and floundering across them.

The caravan itself was visible plodding slowly in the distance. Some of the yents apparently had been turned loose to go where it pleased them, now that there was no more water for them to carry. Barker made out the humped forms of four riders and only one led animal.

He kicked his own mount down the slope, and the desert began to stir, a subtle quivering that skimmed lightly over the surface, raising tiny whorls of dust and dropping them again, as though the great rusty-brown beast had shaken itself in its sleep.

Barker spurred across the plain in the darkening copper glare. He saw the caravan ahead of him, still distant, but quite clear. And

then suddenly it was gone behind the folds of a vast yellow curtain that hid the desert in its hem and the sky in its spreading top.

Barker flung himself out of the saddle. He looped the reins securely over his arm, tore off his shirt and bound it over the yent's head, and belted his own robe tight to his body, with a fold of it wrapped over his face. He tried to fix his direction firmly in his mind. And then the wind hit him.

The yellow wind, the old terror of Mars, eater-up of towns and caravans, ravager of crops and spoiler of the precious canals, destroyer blind and insatiable and big.

Barker fought out the first wild blow on his knees and hanging tight to the forelegs of the beast, with its head drawn down so that it could not bolt. Then he stood up again, or rather crouched, bent double, and began to move forward. The red dust blew around his legs as water in a tide-race swirls around the legs of a wader, and that tide rose again and again above his head. The whole desert was moving now. There was no longer distinct separation of land and sky. They were blended into a single mass, semi-solid, opaque, rushing forward with insane speed, howling and tearing and scouring, beating down and smothering everything in its path.

You could not keep moving for long. And the minute you stopped moving you were lost.

HE DID NOT HAVE TO move far to find the caravan. The wind blew it back to him. A dim shape loomed up and went flying past him, the led animal pulled free and running with the wind. Then other shapes vaguely appeared. A yent with a saddle but no rider, going like the first one. A yent with a man still hanging to its back, just hanging, making no pretense of command. Ambrosia, Barker thought, or Brancato, riding his destiny to its ultimate and unavoidable end. He shouted at the man but he could not tell whether he was heard or seen, and in a second beast and rider were swallowed up in the screaming chaos.

Barker began to quarter back and forth, shouting, squinting desperately through the blinding dust.

He saw a darker solid shadow moving perhaps fifteen feet away, and clawed toward it. It was someone on foot, well muffled and leading a yent hooded like his own. Strands of black hair whipped out from under the person's head-covering. Long hair.

Ylva.

He screamed her name through the screaming of the wind and

some faint echo of his cry must have reached her because she stopped and turned her head. Then the opaque swirls of sand drove between them, hiding her.

But Barker plunged ahead and reached her side. He grabbed her shoulder and shouted in her ear,

"Stay close to me! I think we have a chance — I think my yent knows where shelter is —"

He adjusted the cloth on the head of his yent so the animal could see. He shook the reins loose, keeping the end tied to his belt.

The animal stamped around uncertainly, in terror of the wind and the raging, whirling dust and sand. In a minute it began to move, not with the wind but quartering it.

Barker, keeping his hold on Ylva, stumbled along in the roaring chaos after the yent. He bent his head to hers and shouted, "He belongs to the androids. He's been out in this desert before, and all day he's been fighting to get somewhere, to shelter. I'm letting him go."

"Chelorne?" she asked.

Before he could answer that, the crackling crash of a gun-blast notched to highest power ripped through the howling murk of the yellow wind.

Barker spun and saw, vague, half-hidden by the driving sand and

dust, exaggerated into an enormous, looming figure, the shape of Skene standing with his gun raised. There was someone beside him — Ambrosia or Brancato, staggering wildly.

"*Hai!*" cried Barker to the yent, jumping forward and banging it with his fist, and the terrified beast, suddenly startled, plunged wildly forward.

The pull of its lead-rope yanked Barker, and Ylva with him, almost off their feet. But when he could turn his head again, Skene was lost to sight in the veils of raging sand behind them.

They staggered on. The wind blew fiercer, the dust thicker. The beast that Barker had brought from Llona went with a kind of desperate scuttle toward some place it knew, and all they could do was go with it and pray.

Somewhere out in this were the androids, to whom the storm was nothing. But it was no use to think of them or of what they might do, when they would not live long anyway without shelter.

Barker didn't know how long it took. When the yellow winds blow time ceases, and eternity is while you fight for the next breath, the next step. But suddenly the yent seemed to drop out of sight. He thought it had fallen, but the taut rein pulled him on and the

pressure of the wind stopped so abruptly that he nearly fell. The dust was still blinding, hanging thick. He went down through it with Ylva and gradually it cleared and they were in a sloping passage, running, stumbling, sliding down.

Almost before they knew it they were in Chelorne.

CHAPTER IX

CHELORNE.

And no wonder men had not seen it since the seas dried up and the rolling sand and dust covered the land.

Chelorne was a buried city.

Barker had heard of cities like this, and he had even seen the remains of one once, years ago. There must have been a valley here in ages gone, the valley of the legend, with Chelorne at the bottom of it. And when the dust of the dying world began to settle deeper and deeper in the valley, the people of Chelorne had tried to roof their streets to keep them clear and to seal their windows. But the dust had eventually filled the valley level with the plain, burying the city so that nothing of it showed.

The streets were like tunnels now, rather weirdly lighted by radiant tubes. The wider areas, old squares and plazas, showed as flat-

tened cavēs with forests of orderly pillars marching, and the doors of buildings opened as they always had in the segments of the carved fronts that were still visible. And Chelorne, though buried, could still be used and traversed.

The yent pattered with complete familiarity toward a wide tunnel, obviously heading for the comfort of a stall. Probably it had brought or taken many a load between here and Llona. Barker turned it loose and let it go. Then he and Ylva stood together and looked at Chelorne.

Ylva clung to him, and her eyes were huge and black. "We should not be here."

"No," said Barker, "we shouldn't. It's a trap: I never saw a better one."

His nerves leaped with the awareness of danger. This buried city belonged to the androids. Somewhere in these catacombs they would be right now. The ones who had led the caravan astray, the five who had left Llona in the night would all be here, Barker thought. Even for an android, travel would be easier when the yellow wind had blown itself out. And they would want to make sure afterward that the intruders had safely perished in the storm.

"We've got to find a place to hide," he said. "If we can just

keep out of sight until the storm is over ..."

He began to walk quickly down the tunnel where the yent had gone, looking for a door. Ylva ran beside him.

And it was already too late.

Skene and Brancato came from the entrance tunnel behind them. They both had their guns in their hands. Skene told Barker and the girl to stand still, and then Skene laughed.

"Well," he said, "you did it. You led us to Chelorne."

"I'm sorry," Barker said. "I never meant to."

"I know. And we had the hell of a time following you in the storm. But you did it." He pushed back his cloak and shook the dust out of his hair. His eyes blazed. "I ought to burn your guts out right here and now, Barker, for trying to leave us like that. But I've got a better use for you. Ylva, you come here."

"No," she said. "You can kill me, too."

"And maybe I will, but not just yet." He snapped a shot of crackling force, and Barker spun around, gasping with the pain of a seared shoulder. "I can keep that up quite a while without damaging him too much. You want to come, or shall I play with him some more?"

Ylva moved slowly toward Skene. Brancato seized her and pulled her to one side, out of the line of fire.

"Now then," said Skene to Barker, "we're going to see what's in this place we've come so far to find. And you're going to walk ahead of us, quite a ways ahead, so if the androids are waiting for us they'll get you first. *And*, to make sure you don't try ducking into a doorway somewhere and getting away, this is what'll happen to Ylva if you do."

He fired suddenly at her, burning a thin weal like a whiplash across her bare brown ankle. She did not quite scream. Barker started forward involuntarily and instantly both guns were centered on him.

"Now walk," said Skene.

Barker walked.

He walked where certainly no Earthman had ever walked, and where probably no human being had been since the last true men left Chelorne. He walked through an astonishing remnant of the glory that had been Mars, not all ruined and broken and faded, but bright and whole, the carvings sharp and the colors clear, the splendid frescoes and the golden building ornaments untouched by wear and thieving hands.

He walked, and behind him

were Ylva and the guns, and ahead, around every turn and lurking in every doorway, might wait a swift and vengeful death from unhuman hands.

THEY ENTERED a number of buildings along the way, but there was nothing in them but what had been too massive for the departing owners to carry with them. Brancato cursed the lack of easily portable loot, and Skene said, "That ain't what we came for. We want the secret of how they made androids, and when we get it you can buy all the gold in the Solar System if you want it."

They went on, and still Barker could not hear any sound in Chelorne but their own footfalls. But he was afraid, as he had been afraid in Llona. The air smelled cold and musty like the air in a tomb.

They came into the largest square they had seen yet, with a paving of white marble and a fountain in the center, simply and beautifully carved and dry as the marble itself. Even with the squat disfiguring pillars and the building-fronts necessarily mutilated by the foreshortening roof, the place was magnificent. One building seemed to dominate the rest. It too was of marble, without carving or ornament. And Skene said, on a note

of greedy excitement,

"Hey, look at all them tracks in the dust!"

Barker saw them, the myraid faint footprints in the thin film of dust that coated the marble paving. They all led to the steps of that one building. And Barker, knowing Mars better than Skene did, understood what the building was and what probably was somewhere inside it.

He said, keeping his voice flat and disinterested, "It's only the temple where they go to worship."

This was such a totally new thought that Skene was taken a-back by it. "Temple? Androids? What would they be doing with religion? That's for humans." He laughed. "Humans with souls. Like us."

Barker laughed, too. It was not a humorous sound. He started to walk away from the marble building toward another one.

Suddenly suspicious, Skene said, "No. I want to see this temple."

Ylva caught her breath sharply and said, "The curse of the gods—"

"Curse, my eye," said Skene, and thrust his gun toward Barker, ordering him on. "You first, Barker, unless you want her burned again."

Reluctantly Barker turned and started up the temple steps. Then he stopped. He said quietly, "I don't think we're going anywhere

right now."

There was a rustling sound like the blowing of dry leaves, and the androids were all around them.

They must, Barker thought, have run fast through the covered ways behind the buildings to circle the square. And he had the feeling that the androids had been caught off guard, or they would surely have stopped the intruders before now. Probably they had been sure that the yellow wind would take care of them, and they would have had no way of knowing about Barker and his stop in Llona. Probably, in fact, the arrival of the yent in its stall would have been their first warning that there were strangers in Chelorne.

"Stand where you are," said one of them, and Barker recognized the tall Llonan he had spoken to in Kirruk.

Skene made a bolt for the temple, with Brancato at his heels, dragging Ylva and forcing Barker ahead of them.

A couple of the androids ran to intercept them. They did so quite easily. But Skene gave one of them a bolt full-power in the face and literally burned his head off, and the falling body impeded the other one so that the four humans made it in through the tall doors of plain burnished metal with one single symbol engraved

there and set with gems — the symbol of the atom.

At the firing of the gun the androids cried out softly in alarm.

Skene breathed heavily, in a wild state between fear and greed and the stimulation of violence.

"See?" he panted. "They can die like anybody. And they got no weapons on them. Are they crazy or something?"

"They'll bring weapons," Barker said. "You haven't got a chance, Skene. You might as well —"

Skene was not listening. He had suddenly become aware of what was inside this temple.

The vaulted space was overwhelming in its size and magnificent simplicity. Suspended from the vault by invisible supports, so that it seemed to float in mid-air, was the same atom-symbol that was on the doors, and that Phardon had kept in his shrine in faraway Ganshaw. Only this one was huge, cathedral-sized, and it glowed and pulsed with light.

Through a tall archway beyond Barker could see a second vast space, and in it were shapes of glittering metal and glass, and crystal molds like coffins, and what seemed to be miles of delicate tubing intricately wound into a sort of shining net that filled the whole huge room, with matrices centering ultimately on the crystal cof-

fins. And Barker understood why the androids would not carry weapons near this place, and why they had cried out when Skene fired.

This was the birthplace of the androids, the crystal womb from which their race was replenished. One shot into that room, and the destruction would take years to repair. Perhaps it could never be repaired, who knew?

Skene walked closer to that inner door, and looked, and laughed, and Barker knew that he understood that too.

THE ANDROIDS CAME IN, the naked ones with the white bodies, walking softly as men walk in a holy place.

Skene pointed his gun through the doorway at the labyrinth of delicate tubes, at the glass and metal shapes and crystal molds.

Skene said, "You know what I can do with this gun? You know what I *will* do if you try to jump us?"

The androids stopped. Agony was on their faces. The tall Llonan said, "We know. He looked at Barker. "I should have killed you in Kirruk."

"You should have been on guard here," Barker said. "You were too sure everybody was lost in the storm. And if you wanted to be real sure, you should have killed

us all at the place of rocks, instead of giving us water. What's the matter, are you afraid to kill?"

"Not afraid," said the Llonan. "No. But we were created to help, not to destroy. Therefore it is very hard for us to kill, and when we are forced to it we try to let our enemies destroy themselves, as you would have done."

"Ah," said Skene, "that's good. That's real good. That makes it easy. Nice and docile and easy managed. Well, you've got a new boss now. It's time this secret got around where it can do some good. We'll make plenty more of you and you can make yourselves useful instead of hiding away in a hole in the ground. You hear that, Brancato? You and me. We got the biggest thing there is, and don't go getting any ideas because it'll take both of us, watching each other's backs."

He moved closer to the inner door.

Barker shifted his weight onto the balls of his feet. He slid his right hand inside his shirt, as though to ease his burned shoulder.

"Just why *were* you created?" he asked the Llonan.

The tension in himself and in the air of the place made the android's voice sound strange and

far away. He receded a little, with his fellows, the pale and unhuman shapes caught rigid and helpless in a moment of destiny. The stocky all-too-human shape of Skene grew larger in Barker's eyes, swelling curiously in the doorway against the bright glitter of crystal, until his right wrist, held waist-high but letting the gun droop a little now, seemed as large around as a tree-trunk.

The Llonan said, "The men of Chelorne in the old days worshipped knowledge. They knew that when a race, or a nation, or a planet dies, its knowledge dies with it. They knew that Mars was dying. So they created us, to live on after men could no longer exist, to keep knowledge alive until the end of everything. And in the meantime we were to be friends and helpers to men."

"But men wouldn't let you be, was that it?" said Barker. "They were afraid of your strength and jealous of your immortality. And so —"

Skene said, "How many androids can you make, say, in a year?"

Barker's hand came out of his shirt with the knife in it that he had taken from Murnik's body. He threw it and it stuck itself in the joint of Skene's wrist and the gun fell out of his fingers. Out of the tail of his eye he saw

Ylva bring both her hands down on Brancato's gun-arm. She shouted at Barker and he flung himself after the knife before Skene had got the breath into him to cry out with the pain of his wrist. He heard, but did not see, the sudden rush of the androids behind him. He hit Skene and bore him down. Almost in the same instant Brancato screamed. And then it was as it had been out in the place of the rocks in the desert when he had Skene's throat in his hands before.

"This is for my *remshi*," he said. "And for Ylva —"

He beat Skene's head against the marble floor, until Skene was limp, and dead.

THEN THOSE TERRIBLY strong hands he had felt before in Kirruk grasped him and lifted him away, and he thought, This is it. He said aloud, "Don't hurt the girl, she had nothing to do with coming here." He said, "Ylva? I'm sorry, I wanted to get you away safely." And with the most ridiculous inconsequentiality he added, "I love you —"

"Both men are dead," said the Llonan. "Now tell us why we should not kill you, too."

He stepped away from Barker. Ylva ran to him and put her arm around him and said to the androids,

"He saved your holy place from destruction. He saved you from slavery. You owe him his life."

"By the ancient laws of Mars you do," said Barker, "but I know your secret. I know about Llona and Chelorne. And yet that's your fault, too. You saved my *remshi* from death in the pass, and by that act you condemned him to death. I followed the blood debt here and now it's paid. There my interest ends. I don't want your secret, and I don't want slaves. But there is no reason why you should believe me."

"No," said the Llonan. "There is not."

"No wonder," said Ylva fiercely, "that men fear and hate you." She looked up at Barker and there was that in her face that caught at his heart with memories of another face long ago, softer and less wild but with that same proud look of love. "I am sorry, Colin Barker, that we could not have lived longer."

"What gods do you swear by?" asked the Llonan.

Barker looked down at his hands and held out the right one. "I will promise — by this."

"And the woman?"

"A good wife obeys her husband's will."

"Then promise. And remember

that our feet are swift and our ears keen, if you should ever forget your oath."

Barker shook his head. "Without that yent, I couldn't find Chelorne again if I wanted to. And as for Llona, you could be gone from there before any real trouble could reach you — and you know it."

"When the yellow wind dies down," said the Llonan, "we will take you safely, not past Llona to Kirruk, but by another way which only we know. And you will not return."

Days later, the Llonan pointed across the desert and said to Barker and Ylva,

"There is the canal, and your way lies so."

Barker and Ylva went. And as

they walked on across the sands, Barker looked back. The androids, the not-men dressed now again as men, had turned their faces back toward the north.

Barker thought of the tiny village beyond the Qed and the lonely lives of those who dwelt there, wearing out the weary centuries until they someday inherited the world and fulfilled their purpose. He wondered if it would be so, if they would outlast the sons of men. Or would they, in time, bridge the great gap and become the friends of men?

He did not know. He only knew that the present was sweet, with the sun warm upon his face and the desert wind in his nostrils, and with the hand of Ylva tightly clasped in his as they walked on.

★ *Flying Saucer Facts* ★

SO MUCH HAS BEEN written about the sighting of flying saucers that this is no place to add another word - - nor is it intended. The flying saucer we speak of, is an aircraft - - not mythical, not proposed, but an actual flying saucer.

Perhaps the name is exaggerated, but the present flying disc - - a number are being built in the world - - one in Canada, one here and several in Europe - - is in appearance not unlike the slim disc of the

fiction writers. But the disc is powered with conventional gas turbines, jets, which thrust out vast volumes of gas through special ports linked by a circular gallery.

The flying disc hovers and floats in a way that no aircraft can except the balloon, but when speed is required it knifes through the atmosphere at an incredible rate.

The shape of the flying disc is not accidental. It is contrived in terms of aerodynamic soundness. (That is *not* an argument for the

mythical saucers!) In essence the flying disc is a vast thin wing with all that implies in low air resistance and knife-like air penetrating ability.

This is merely a beginning. It must be recalled that flying platforms, ducted fans, helicopters, and other flying machines are using thrust principles which are revolutionizing ordinary flight.

These machines depend primarily on the thrust from columns of gas and air. This reaction thrust permits them to behave like rockets on one hand and balloons on the other.

More and more powerful jet engines are being constructed. As metallurgy and thermodynamics learn more about producing thrust

engines, we can expect to see developed shortly engines with thrusts of tens and hundreds of thousands of pounds. In that sense gravity, at least in the atmosphere, is being conquered.

It is wise not to minimize the effect that the simple shrouded ducted fan will have on our times. This platform driven by a couple of outboard motors shafted to a pair of contra-props, is the nearest thing to gravity defiance we can think of - the military thinks so too. And it won't be long before these ducted fans find their way into private ownership a la the glider.

Flight, a wing drawn or pushed by a propeller is gradually passing. Thrust is the modern form!



"Big-eyed monsters! Let's attack them!"

There wasn't a cure for the sickness that struck humans down in horrible agony. And Keeton lacked any clues to follow in his race to stop—

The Red Rash Deaths

by

Robert Moore Williams

“**H**ELP!” THE WOMAN screamed. “He’s killing me.”

Paul Keeton took a split second to locate the sound of the scream as coming from the third floor of the apartment house. “You hold on here and keep in touch with me,” he spoke to the driver behind the wheel of the green truck. “Sure thing, lieutenant,” the driver said. “But — are you going in there, if he’s in there?”

“That’s my job,” Keeton answered. Jumping out of the truck, he ran toward the back steps of the apartment house. Inside, stairs lighted with a single dim glow lamp led upward. He went up three steps at a time.

The man was coming down. His eyes were yellow, like those of a goat.

At the sight of those yellow eyes, cold chills appeared all over Keet-

on’s body. The only description he had indicated that the man they wanted was tall and skinny, with long arms like those of a scarecrow, and eyes that held a distinct yellow tint. The man above him on the stairs fitted this description perfectly.

The stairway was narrow. Keeton veered to one side to let the fellow pass, then seemed to stumble, catching the man by the shoulder to steady himself. As his hand was pressed against the man’s coat, he broke a tiny capsule that he was holding in his palm. A drop of liquid spurted from the capsule and into the cloth of the coat.

“Sorry,” Keeton hastily apologized. “A woman screamed somewhere.”

“Up that way.” Goat Eyes jerked a thumb upward, then brushed on past the detective. Keeton made no effort to stop him



but continued on up the stairs, stopping at the top landing.

Coming from an open door down the hallway, the screams were dying down. Reaching inside his coat, the lieutenant pressed a tiny button there. A tiny speaker hidden inside his left ear came to life.

"Yes, lieutenant." The voice was that of the truck driver.

"He's heading out the back."

"Shall I grab him?"

"No. Let him go."

"Let him escape? When we've gone to all this trouble to get a line on him?" The speaker was incredulous.

"Yes. I managed to break a capsule of isotope x on his coat. You can follow its radiations for at least a hundred miles. Take a fix on that and follow him. We don't want to just catch him, we want to know all about him, where he comes from and where he hides? There's more to this than appears on the surface."

"I k- -k- -know." The truck driver's teeth were suddenly chattering. "Got him," the voice came again. "He's heading down the alley, where he thinks it's too dark for him to be seen, but that isotope x on his coat makes a light as bright as the sun."

"Good. You follow him. I'll find out what happened here."

"Y- -yes, lieutenant."

Keeton headed down the hall.

Most of her clothes stripped from her body, the woman was lying on the floor. She was a pretty dish. Or she had been. Keeton could see the red rash already appearing on her skin.

The lieutenant moved around the woman, very carefully, to the telephone. Keeping his eyes on the figure on the floor, he muzzled the instrument between his ear and shoulder. The phone grumbled in his ear.

"Pappy?"

"Yes." A voice snapped at him. The man on the other end of the line was always in a bad humor.

"This is Paul. Send the decontamination squad." He gave an address.

"What the hell, another one?" the phone squawked. Horror radiated from the vibrating diaphragm.

"Yes. Make certain the squad is in full protective clothing, with inhalators. Bring a bag for the body. Have the squad take it straight to the laboratory but warn the lab boys what they're dealing with before they open it."

"Think I'd miss that?" the phone protested. "The lab boys would cut out my liver and lights if I didn't warn them on something like this."

"I also want this room thoroughly decontaminated!"

"Sure. *This room?*" The voice that came over the phone had sudden anguish in it. "Do you mean you're in the same room with one of those red bodies?"

"Take it easy, pappy. I'm immune."

"Delozer had the same delusion. Frunk thought he was immune too. Carnahan was sure —"

"Shut up!" Keeton snapped. These men were friends of his. He did not want to be reminded that they had died of the red rash and that the immunity the doctors had devised for them had failed.

THE PHONE WAS SUDDEN-ly serious. "Listen, Paul, I love you like a son. If you're actually in the same room with one of those red bodies, I want you to head for the roof of the building, fast, and I'll send a 'copter from headquarters to pick you up. I want the doctors to look you over —"

"The docs examined Delozer and Frunk and Carnahan," Keeton pointed out. "A lot of good their examination did. I haven't touched the body. The only thing I have touched in the room is the floor that I walked on and this phone."

"Then don't touch anything. Get out of there as fast as you can."

"Okay, okay," Keeton answered, his voice gruff. "I — " He stopped

speaking as his gaze came to rest on the bed.

"What is it, Paul? What happened. Did he come back?"

"Nothing." Keeton answered. Now he could clearly see what was on the bed. A sick nausea began to grip his stomach.

"Paul, don't try to lie to me. You stopped talking. Now your voice has changed."

"There's not a damned thing that is wrong!" Keeton shouted. "Get that decontamination squad here fast. Send the homicide boys too but tell them not to enter the place until the decontamination squad has finished."

"Do you think the homicide men are crazy?" the phone demanded. "We probably won't be able to get one of them within a block of the place. Paul—"

"I've got one of my boys in a truck with a fix on the killer," Keeton shouted. "I've got to go see about him." He hung up and started out of the room. His feet took him around the body of the woman, but they refused to take him out of the doorway. His eyes went back to the bed.

It was a baby, all right. Her baby. Keeton glanced down again at the body on the floor. She hadn't stirred since he entered. The rash on her skin was redder now and it seemed to cover a bigger

surface.

"I've got to get out of here," Keeton thought. He tried to take another step toward the door. Sweat broke out all over him as the baby began to cry. It was a frightened little sound in the silence of a room that seemed suddenly as big as the universe. And as menacing.

Slight as the cry was, the mother heard it. She was almost dead, but this cry brought her back to life. Her eyes flickered and she stirred. She crawled to the bed and gathered the baby in her arms.

"Madam, you can't do that!" Keeton gasped. Then was silent. She had already done it. The baby cried again, a wail that went into slow silence. The mother was suddenly quiet. Bending over them, Keeton saw the red rash on the skin of the baby. As he watched, the little mouth puckered again, to cry out, a sound that was never made. Mother and child both went into the long silence.

Now Keeton's legs would take him out the door. He went down the back stairs and stood in the back yard. All around him was the hum of a mighty city, Chicago of the year 1970. He did not hear it. Overhead were stars. He did not see them. He had watched a mother and a baby die of a creeping red rash. What meaning had

Chicago, or the stars overhead, or life itself, when such things happened?

The button phone in his ear emitted a shrill whistle. "What the hell do you want?" Keeton said.

"I want you to get here, fast," the truck driver spoke in his ear. "Why?"

"I think he has spotted that somebody is following him."

"So what?"

"So I'd like to keep on living, that's so what," the truck driver said emphatically. "He suddenly back-tracked for a couple of blocks. He may have seen me."

"So we all have to die sometime. So what?"

"Have you seen any of his victims die?" the truck driver demanded.

"Yes," Keeton said bluntly. "I'll get to you as quickly as I can. Where are you?"

"Cruising on Ninth Street. Burn rubber getting here."

KEETON WENT DOWN the alley to his little souped-up sports car that he had parked a block away. The little job cost him a fortune but it was faster than anything the police department could furnish him. As he slid under the wheel, sirens howled past him and a whirling red light cast bright gleams over him. The decontamina-

tion squad, sweating in their pants at what lay before them. He pressed the starter. At the rear, a herd of horses suddenly pounded with impatient hoofs as the powerful motor came to life.

Thoughts flicked through his mind as he gunned the car into traffic. A killer, whose identity was completely unknown, was on the loose. As his victims died, a red rash appeared on their skin. This rash was not the cause of death — as yet the lab men had been unable to determine the cause — but was a secondary effect. Worst of all was the fact that anybody who came into contact with one of the bodies while the red rash was still showing also died. Touching a red body was equal to signing a death warrant. The mother had touched her baby. Usually death was slower but in this case the baby had died within seconds.

No known germ, no microbe, no virus, could produce such results. The first person who had died had spread an infection that had devastated eight city blocks as the red rash spread from person to person. The second kill had been discovered and brought under control much earlier. Only two blocks had been left without inhabitants. The third kill had been discovered and diagnosed almost immediately. Only the immediate family, and

the doctor who had done the diagnosing, had died.

Chicago was a frantic city. Every police officer in town was on the alert. Federal men were present by the scores.

Who was the killer? What were his motives? Where did he come from? What method did he use in his killings? The science of 1970 was baffled. It knew no weapon that could produce such results. The doctors knew no germ or virus that could spread as the red rash spread.

Gunning his car through traffic, Keeton was aware that his eyes were constantly coming back to his hands gripping the steering wheel. His eyes seemed to be drawn back again and again to his hands. He wondered why. Suddenly the reason struck him. He was watching them to see if they were going to start turning red.

The phone whistled in his ear again. "Yeah?" he said.

"He went into an old warehouse," the report came. The truck driver's teeth were no longer chattering.

"Is he still in there?"

"Yes. This scope is sensitive enough to pick up isotope x through concrete walls."

"Good. Did he find out you were following him?"

"I don't think so. He just back-

tracked to check. Do you want me to turn in a general alarm on him?"

Roaring through traffic, Keeton considered this problem. At his call, a tidal wave of police in and out of uniform would converge on the old warehouse. They would come from all sections of the city, on wheels and through the air. "No," he said at last. "I don't want to take a chance on alarming him until we have him cold."

"Do you mean for just you and me to take him?" the phone wailed in his ear.

"He's only one man," Keeton said, comfortingly.

"I wish I was sure he's a man," the phone protested, refusing to be comforted.

"What do you think he is — the devil?"

"Y- - yes."

"What kind of a superstitious idiot are you?" the lieutenant shouted. "Sign off."

The phone went into hurt silence. A few minutes later, Keeton found the green truck, parked beside the curb. He got out of his car and walked up to it. The driver was shivering. "He — he's in that warehouse — over there," the driver whispered, pointing.

The structure the driver indicated was three stories high. Built of concrete, it was grayed and weatherbeaten. Keeton studied the

building with thoughtful eyes. "Not being used," he said.

"I think that's the way it is," the driver answered.

A block away, the warehouse was windowless.

"I think we ought to send in a call for e- -everybody on the force," the truck driver said. "We'll surround the building, each man with his hands linked to the man next to him, and begin to close in. He'll never get through a line like that."

"And if he shoots that red stuff into one man, what's to keep every other man in the line from contacting it?"

"G- - golly! I didn't think of that."

Soft footsteps sounded behind Keeton. Behind the wheel of the truck, the driver also heard them. He went stiff. Keeton turned slowly. He expected to find himself looking at a man with the eyes of a goat.

A WHITE-HAIRED MAN with one of the gentlest, kindest faces the detective had ever seen, was standing on the sidewalk. Paul Keeton had appeared in court many times, offering testimony in the cases he had handled. He had seen many judges. Some had been adamant, some had been hostile, but all had been stern. This man's face was sterner than any judge

Keeton had ever seen, but over it, like a halo, was that incredible expression of deep kindness. It was as if this man had looked at all the pain of all men on earth, had seen all their follies, all their criminal acts, and knowing these things about them, was still kindly disposed toward them.

"What can I do for you — sir?" Involuntarily Keeton added the *sir*.

"I am looking for —" The voice was as gentle as the face, but in it was that same note of sternness. The words were soft and slurred, with a foreign accent, but Keeton could not determine what language this man was accustomed to speaking. It seemed to be English, but it was English grown softer and gentler. "Um —" The slurred words went into silence as the white-haired man stared at the detective.

"What are you looking for?"

"Um —. Ah, yes. Thank you." As if he had somehow gained the answer that he wanted, the white-haired man bowed to Keeton, then continued his stroll along the street. Turning a corner, he went out of sight.

"Who — who was that?" the driver of the truck gasped.

"I don't know," the detective answered. "You see all kinds in this part of town."

"I — I feel as if God had just

walked by and lifted up the top of my head and had taken a look at my brains," the driver whispered.

Keeton gave the driver a startled look. "So far as I know, God hasn't been seen in this part of town recently. Even the cops walk their beat in pairs down here. You cover for me."

"What are you going to do? You don't mean to tell me you're going into that warehouse alone?" Incredulous horror rasped in the driver's voice.

"Why not?" Keeton answered. The memory of the dead mother and the dead baby was strong in his mind. "This has got to stop. And right now."

He let him through a broken basement window and into a place that smelled of rats and decay and oil and machinery and compressed wheat and oats and chickens and cottonseed cakes and soap. And ozone. The gas that could be smelled in the air after a heavy thunderstorm.

So far as he knew, ozone was usually produced by a brush discharge in open air of electrical currents. There was another method it could be produced, by irradiating pure oxygen with ultraviolet light in the wave length range around 2,500 Angstrom units. Why should he be smelling ozone in the basement of an old ware-

house?

Keeton did not know and did not care. What was important was the fact that the man with the yellow eyes of a goat was in here. The detective went cautiously upward from the basement, feeling his way along the concrete steps that led to the first floor.

From somewhere overhead came a heavy hum. It was not loud but it conveyed the impression of terrific power. Simultaneously the odor of ozone increased. Gun in hand, the lieutenant froze against the wall. The sound went into abrupt silence. It seemed to leave a vacuum behind it.

"Why should ozone make me think of death?" he wondered. Then wondered why he had wondered. Death was in this building and he knew it. Perhaps his death. He shrugged the thought aside. In his belief, death was only another adventure in the long, long journey the soul makes. He continued on, up the basement stairs.

A light flared over his body. "Okay," a voice said behind him. "Drop your gun and get your hands up." For a split second, Keeton had the impression that his back was against a wall and that he was facing a firing squad.

"If you hesitate, I'll press this button a little harder," the voice continued. "You know what will

happen then?"

"No," Keeton said.

"You'll break out in a nice red rash."

Keeton dropped the pistol and lifted his hands. The gun thudded on the concrete steps with a heavy metallic thud. Footsteps came up behind him. The gun was lifted from the steps.

"Just as soon as I discovered the radiating material on my coat, I knew I would be followed," Goat Eyes said. "I've been waiting for you."

"Are you also waiting for the police who are following me?" Keeton asked.

"No, but I'll be glad to have them come calling. There will be a lot of red-faced cops around." He laughed at his own joke. "Walk on up the stairs. And remember, while this gun is giving off light right now, if I press the trigger another notch, it will give off a radiation strong enough to turn you red all over."

ON THE SECOND FLOOR, Keeton was steered into a big room. Workbenches lined the walls. To the right was a piece of heavy equipment from which the vibration had come. Hissing and frying to itself, it was still generating ozone. Glancing at it, Keeton knew that the science of 1970 had not

produced anything like this.

"What planet are you from?" The lieutenant's voice was casual and matter of fact.

"The generator makes you wonder?" Goat Eyes answered. "You're wrong, though. I'm as human as you are."

"Maybe you are," Keeton said. "But I don't remember killing as many people as you have. Why did you do that?"

"Damned fools kept getting in my way," Goat Eyes shrugged.

"What about the ones who died simply because they touched your victims?"

"Accident. What difference does it make? There are too many damned humans anyhow."

"How does your weapon operate?"

Goat Eyes glanced down at the instrument which he held in his hand. "A high frequency force field is projected on a beam of light. It disrupts the atomic structure of the nervous system. A person who is struck with the beam in any vital part is actually dead to all intents and purposes as soon as it touches him though a few muscular reactions may continue for some time, as the disintegration proceeds through the entire nervous system. The effect appears on the nerve endings of the skin as a red rash and is transmitted out-

ward from the body. Anyone who touches the body while this discharge is taking place picks up the effect too." The voice was precise and the words were well chosen.

"You talk like a scientist," Keeton said, fishing for further information.

"I am a scientist," Goat Eyes answered. "The greatest who ever lived." The yellow eyes glittered with colossal egotism as he spoke, with a vanity big enough to engulf the Earth.

The egotism vanished as Keeton chopped downward with the side of his hand across the wrist of the man with yellow eyes. The detective struck with all his strength, knowing that his life depended on this one blow. Goat Eyes would never have revealed so much about himself if he had intended for Keeton to remain alive.

The blow paralyzed the man's arm. The weapon dropped from a hand that was suddenly nerveless. It clattered on the floor. Light with a reddish tinge flared across Keeton's feet. He struck with his fist, upward at the chin. The blow landed. Goat Eyes went over backward. Keeton threw himself at the man. On his back, Goat Eyes kicked upward. His feet landed in the detective's stomach.

Pain shot upward through Keeton's middle, a jolt of it that was

like a flash of lightning. He fell to one side and hit the floor on his back. Goat Eyes was already scrambling to his feet. Keeton tried to rise. His feet were like wooden boards, stiff and incapable of movement. He could not move them.

As Goat Eyes got to his feet, Keeton grabbed him around the ankles like an end on a football team making a shoestring tackle on a darting ball carrier who was trying to elude him.

Goat Eyes went down. There was a sharp splintering sound of a bone breaking. The man screamed at the pain. His left arm was limp.

"Go on and scream," Keeton said. "You didn't show any sympathy for any of your victims."

"I'll fix you!" He struck at Keeton's face with his right fist. Keeton, desperately hoping that he would be able to move his feet again, ducked his chin against the man's knees and hung on. He did not dare let go with either hand. Goat Eyes might use such an opportunity to shake loose and get to his feet. The fellow's fist pounded on the detective's skull.

Keeton had a hard head. He needed it now. More than anything else, he needed the ability to move his feet. The paralysis was creeping up past his ankles. It was to his knees! So far as he could tell, by

the feeling in them, his legs had been cut off at the knees. The paralysis was slowly climbing higher.

Taking a chance, Keeton let go with one hand and reached for the control button on the tiny radio transmitter inside his coat. Help was ready at the end of the radiations from this transmitter. The driver in the green truck could instantly turn in a report. Within a matter of minutes, squad cars would begin to move in this direction from every section of the city. Helicopters would take off from the roof of police headquarters to land on the roof of the warehouse. Men would come down from the roof. Others would swarm in through the basement.

As if he divined Keeton's intention, Goat Eyes left off his efforts to reach the work bench and snatched at the lieutenant's hand. Catching the control, he yanked it out. Keeton found himself staring at the ends of broken wires.

Goat Eyes threw himself backward. His lunge enabled him to reach the shelf under the bench. From the tools there, he grabbed a heavy socket wrench.

KEETON HAD TO GRAB the man's arm to save his own head. Instantly, Goat Eyes jerked his legs free and was on his feet.

He darted for the weapon lying on the floor. Picking it up, he aimed the nozzle at Keeton. A look of sadistic satisfaction on his face, he pressed the trigger.

Nothing happened.

Goat Eyes examined the weapon. "When it hit the floor, it broke," he muttered. "That is all that saved you and even that won't save you long." His eyes, fixed on the detective's helpless form, glittered with a satanic fury. Then they began to glow with satanic delight.

"Look at your legs!" he shouted. "Pull up your pants and look."

Keeton could see the exposed flesh at the ankle. Little pin pricks of red were already making a rash there. Striking the floor, the beam of the weapon had sprayed across his feet, causing the paralysis there. Now the red rash was working its way upward along the nervous system, moving from cell to cell, from molecule to molecule, from atom to atom, infecting and paralyzing the nerve trunks as it moved. Soon it would reach the major nerve plexus at the base of the spine. From this point, it would spread rapidly upward along the spinal cord. First, the nerves that fed the lower abdomen would cease operating, then the nerves that fed the stomach then those that kept the heart beating. When this point was reached, the end would come.

Lifting himself on one hand, Keeton lurched toward the bottom shelf of the work bench. Snatching another wrench from it, he whirled his torso and threw the wrench like a battle club.

Goat Eyes tried to dodge. The wrench struck him in the throat, just at the Adam's apple, in the spot where a human can be instantly paralyzed.

The man with the yellow eyes made a strangling sound in his throat. His hands calsed at his windpipe as if he was trying to tear a hole there to admit air. Then he went down.

On the floor, he made gulping noises and tried to move. The blow had not been fatal and he was not dead. Given time, he would recover.

Slowly, pulling himself on his hands and dragging his paralyzed legs behind him, Keeton crawled along the floor. He reached the body. His hands caught Goat Eyes by the throat. He clamped them shut there in a vise-like grip that would not be released as long as he lived and probably would continue long after he was dead. He found grim satisfaction in the thought that when the rescue squads finally arrived, they would find him dead, with his hands on the throat of his enemy.

Footsteps sounded behind him

and he turned his head. The white haired man with the stern but kind face had entered the room. He took one look at the two bodies on the floor. Pain shot through his face, disturbing the kindness there. He took quick steps forward. With hands that had tremendous strength in them, he broke the detective's grip on the throat of the man with the yellow eyes.

"What is the meaning of this? Why have you attempted to kill Evonar?"

"Because he has it coming!"

"No man has the right to kill another man!" The face was as stern as a granite mountain.

"You tell him that," Keeton whispered. "He needs that information, bad. He has a weapon that produces a red rash — and death. We don't know, yet, how many times he has used it."

"The *Thronth* generator!" the white-haired man gasped. "But he can't have remembered how to construct this device. When we banished him here, we carefully blocked out all knowledge of our science from his brain, so that he could not remember."

"I don't know how you did what you claim, but your blackout didn't work on him." Keeton could feel his hips beginning to turn numb. The red rash was creeping upward inch by inch. He tried not to think

of this.

"Are you telling the truth? Can you be telling the truth?"

"Of course I'm telling the truth. I'm a law officer sent to bring him to justice for his crimes."

"You an officer of the law! But I found you trying to strangle him. Is that the way you treat suspected criminals, by killing them without trial." Repugnance went across the face that was alternately stern and kind.

Keeton pointed down at his exposed ankles. "He had already put death on me. I was just taking him along on the trip."

The eyes of the white-haired man came to rest on Keeton's ankles. Horror appeared on his face. "That is the effect of the *Thronth* generator! He did succeed in remembering what we thought we had blocked out of his brain. Do you mean he used it on you?"

Keeton nodded. "It was an accident, but he would have used it on me if I hadn't jumped him first. He has used it on many others. Thousands have died."

The pain in the man's face was a living thing. "I — I find that hard to believe. Criminal we knew he was. That was why we banished him here. But —"

"You banished him here?" Keeton whispered. The numbness in his hips was increasing. "Banished him

from where?"

The question seemed to surprise the man with the white hair. "From the year — Let me see. I have to translate into your system of reckoning. It would be your year 10,221."

"The future?"

"Of course. We solved time travel in your year of about 9,000."

IN A FLICKERING INSTANT, everything fitted into place in Keeton's mind. Now he understood why Goat Eyes should have possessed such an unusual weapon. He also understood the machinery in this strange laboratory. Men of the future had banished a criminal to the past. The red rash deaths had been the result as this criminal had recovered and tried to use the science of that far-off future to establish himself in 1970.

"Why are you here?" Keeton asked.

"I am what you would call his parole officer. I was sent back through time to contact him and to make a report on his activities. What a report I shall have to make!" Sadness appeared on the stern face.

"You won't have to make any report!" Goat Eyes was on his feet. "I'll take care of both of you." He darted toward the rear where he snatched another weapon from a

drawer.

"You should have let me kill him," Keeton whispered.

With a movement incredibly fast, the white-haired man pulled an object that resembled a fountain pen from his pocket. He pointed it at the criminal. No sound, no light, came from it. Something invisible to the eyes hummed through the room. Goat Eyes collapsed on the floor.

The only sound in the place was the hum of the heavy machine, generating its strange currents.

"I thought you said it was against your code of ethics to kill," Keeton whispered. The numbness had passed beyond his hips and had entered his lower spine.

"He is not dead," the answer came. "But he is unconscious and he will remain that way while I take him back to his own time, for another trial there, to answer for his actions here."

"He's going to be tried. Good. I —" The numbness came racing up the detective's spine and he could talk no longer.

He was aware that the white-haired man was suddenly bending over him. "I saw the rash but I didn't realize — the fact didn't sink home — I am so sorry —"

Keeton wondered what good it did to be sorry. He was dying. He hardly saw the white-haired man

use the object that resembled a fountain pen go over his body with it, inch by inch. The detective could hear a soft hum coming from the instrument. Something else was also coming from it. He could feel warm pulsating vibrations passing through his body. As the vibrations touched him, the numbness vanished. Suddenly he could talk again. Then his legs came back to life. He tried to sit up. Exhaustion prevented it.

"You will be all right in an hour or so," the man from the future told him. "I have cancelled the effects of the nerve-destroying radiations. You will be all right." He moved rapidly to the side of the man with the yellow eyes.

Keeton saw him take another tiny instrument from his pocket.

Intuitively the detective knew that this was a communication device, but that instead of sending messages through space, it sent them through time and he knew the white-haired man was contacting somebody in the far-off future. A quick conversation took place.

A heavy hum sounded in the air. It came out of nowhere but the very foundations of the concrete building seemed to vibrate with it. Returning to the future from which they had come, Goat Eyes and his parole officer vanished before Keeton's astonished gaze.

Keeton straightened slowly and walked to the door. He knew the case was solved. But he was wondering if he dared tell headquarters the truth. . .

THE END

★ Mathematical Nuts ★

WHEN YOU CONSIDER the tremendous advances made by modern mathematicians you are easily apt to forget that there are plenty of unsolved problems. A few of these gems have driven the best minds almost mad!

For example, show a formula that will describe all the primes, that is, the numbers divisible only by themselves and one. Simple, no . . . various sieves have been designed to show how to obtain all the primes

to n , but there is none which encompasses their infinite number.

Or here is a better one; prove that only four colors are needed to color any map without having adjacent "countries" with the same color. It has been proved that five colors are sufficient for this purpose, but it is known from experience that no matter how complicated the map, four colors will suffice. Prove it! The best minds in mathematics having beaten out their

brains in an effort to solve this simple teaser - - no one's done it yet . . .

Mathematics is rich with problems far more difficult on the face of it. But it also has even simpler problems which have not been solved satisfactorily.

A notable example of this concerns curves. In spite of tremendous work in point-set topology and measure theory, the proper, unequivocal definition of a curve, is missing.

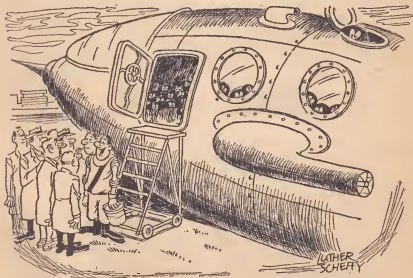
For that matter a complete logical description of the number system has yet to be given. Or do some work in metal mathematics, the philosophical system which talks about

the nature of mathematics.

If any novice thinks that all worlds have been conquered, if he is dismayed by the plentitude of publication that inundates the would-be mathematical reader, let him reflect on a few unsolved problems to realize that not everything is known.

Sometimes, in the most staid and settled subjects—geometry for example—new things can be turned up rather easily. This does not constitute the best of mathematical creation necessarily, but it often is sufficient for personal satisfaction.

No, Virginia, not *everything* is known . . .



"We made it all right, but the ship still has a few bugs in it."



Every secret agent sent to Mercury turned up dead; now Courtney volunteered for the task of trapping Thurston, the man who ruled this—

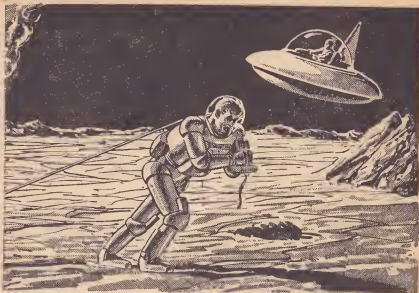
Devil's World

by

Randall Garrett

THE ASTRONOMY TEXT-books called it Mercury, but as far as SSP Lieutenant Roger Courtney was concerned it was just plain Hell. Even in the

heatsuit Boss Thurston had so obligingly supplied, Courtney felt torrents of sweat rippling down his body. He forced his tired legs to struggle along, but the knowledge



that he hadn't long to live numbed him and sucked vitality from his limbs.

"Come on now, *haul!*"

The mocking voice of the overseer echoed harshly in his suit-phones. Courtney gave another tug on the permoplast line and the cargo of molten metal slid forward another few feet. Somewhere up ahead was the blessed relief of the Twilight Zone, but he was wobbling unsteadily on his feet and probably wouldn't make it.

And if he dropped on his kisser in the sands, they'd just leave him there. Boss Thurston would be overjoyed to be rid of him—and

life came cheap on Mercury.

Mercury—the Devil's world.

"Haul! Haul!" the overseer urged.

Courtney tugged until his muscles felt ready to pop from his arms. He glared up bitterly at the overseer's car overhead. The overseer rode in a heatproof gravcopter that was nice and balmy inside despite the blazing heat of the swollen, bloated sun filling the sky. *He* wasn't roasting. He was comfortable.

"I'm hauling," Courtney muttered. "If you don't like the way I'm doing it, come down here and show me!"

"Strong words, Courtney! But that's no way to talk to a superior."

Courtney felt a shock of surprise; he hadn't known the suit-phones were working two-way. But they were—and the overseer had heard him. A sudden bolt of energy flickered down from above—a nerve-torturing electrostim. He shuddered and grabbed the line for support. The pain was agonizing.

"Any more sweet words, Courtney?"

He clamped his lips together and hauled. Before him, hovering in the airless waste, dancing mockingly, he saw the figure of Boss Charlie Thurston—Boss Charlie, who had seized control of Mercury Mines and held the little world in a mailed grip. Boss Charlie, who had smiled as he condemned Roger Courtney to a tour of duty in the Sunside Mines. . . . a sure sentence of death.

"Haul there, Courtney! Haul!"

He hauled.

Outside the heatsuit the temperature was climbing rapidly up above the 500° mark, according to the thermometer on the right wrist of Courtney's suit. That was mild, he thought. It was just a balmy Mercurian morning so far. Wait till the heat *really* gets going—up around 600° and 700°, when heat-ghosts flickered maddeningly up

and down the craggy plain and men's flesh turned to water.

Inside the suit it was only 106°, according to the left-wrist thermometer. The heatsuit was a pretty good thing. But a man couldn't do physical labor in plus-100° temperature wearing a bulky suit like this, even in Mercury's low grav.

A man died after enough of it.

"Haul, Courtney!"

"I'm hauling," he grunted.

This was the sort of work that ought to be done by robots, he thought. Pulling ladlesful of molten metal over the Mercurian plains on Sunside, dragging them to the lip of the mines. But robots couldn't be used here. Robots had delicate cryotronic brains that were dandy on Darkside, but blanked out totally on Sunside.

They couldn't use robots for the job; they weren't tough enough, and they were too expensive. So Thurston used men.

THERE WASN'T ANY REASON why Thurston should have found out Courtney was an SSP agent. Courtney had arrived on Mercury wearing a lifemask that should have hidden his true identity under all tests but a direct mindprobe—and he didn't recall having been probed. It made no sense at all. But yet Thurston couldn't have done it with a blind

guess!

Courtney remembered Chief of Patrol Helgerson's words to him:

"We know Thurston's a sharpie, and we know he's up to shady maneuvers on Mercury. But, dammit, we can't *prove* anything. And every time we put an agent down on the accursed planet he nails the man."

"How well concealed were they?" Courtney asked.

"The best masking job the Bureau can do. We've lost three men on Mercury now—"

"Lost?"

"That's right. Thurston's allowed a certain amount of casualties each year, due to Sunside work; the pay is tremendously high, and the men who go out there know what they're facing. And somehow each of the agents we've sent to Mercury has gotten into the Sunside mines—and each of them shortly after gets reported dead from one cause or another attributable to the heat. It's all nice and legal, and there's not a thing we can do. Thurston finds our men and sends them out in that hell to die. And meanwhile he's growing rich on the illicit power he diverts on that pipeline to Venus."

"There *is* something we can do, Chief."

"What's that?"

"Send *me* there. I'll come back

with the goods on Charlie Thurston."

"It's more likely you won't come back at all. But I'll risk one more man. Just one."

Now that he looked back on that conversation, Courtney realized that everything the Chief had predicted was about to come true.

He hadn't been on Mercury a day before three of Thurston's toughs had called on him in his bunk in Twilight Zone. He opened the door and they came muscling in, grabbing him before he could move.

They took him to Thurston. The heavyset Boss of Mercury Mines smiled urbane as Courtney was thrust into his presence, struggling and kicking.

"You're very violent, Mr. Courtney. Or should I say, *Lieutenant Courtney*?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"You needn't play games, Lieutenant. Your identity is crystal-clear to me." Thurston turned, paced the room, put his hands on a jewel-encrusted rectangular box that sat on his desk. "I know exactly who you are, and why you're here. And I can assure you that I have no intentions of allowing you to return to Earth and tell lies about me."

"Murder's a crime, Thurston."

"So it is! But who spoke of murder?"

Thurston turned to his desk and spoke rapidly into the communicator. "Tell Overseer Ludlow of the Sunside Corps that I'm sending him a recruit. The recruit's name is Courtney—and he looks like a good hand at the zinc mines. Okay. Take him away."

MERCURY was the smallest planet of the Solar System, smaller indeed than several of the great moons of the giant planets Saturn and Jupiter. But the mighty industries of Earth and the growing Venus colony were becoming more and more dependent for their power on Mercury—the little giant of the Solar System.

Mercury bobbed around the Sun in an 88-day year, one face turned endlessly toward the blazing heat, the other hemisphere brushing the darkness of space. Thanks to the eccentricities of the planet's orbit, a Twilight Zone some few hundred miles wide ran the circumference of Mercury—and here it was that Mercury Mines had its headquarters and Charlie Thurston ruled his kingdom.

Tightbeam interplanetary teleport communication was fixed between the Twilight Zone and both Earth and Venus, powered by the mighty energies of the nearby sun.

Mercury Mines supplied raw metals to Venus, which had hardly any beneath its formaldehyde atmosphere, and Earth, which was well on its way to exhausting its own mineral supply.

It wasn't hard work to find metal on Mercury. A lake of molten zinc fifty miles wide and unfathomably deep lay in the heart of Sunside, right on the surface for the taking. It was mere child's play to scoop the metal up and subsequently ship it to the needy planets.

Child's play. The only trouble was the teleports were located in Twilight Zone, and there was absolutely no way of setting them up under the tremendous magnetic stress of Sunside conditions. So the metal had to be hauled from the lakes to the matter-transmitters.

Boss Charlie had found men to do it. His theory was a simple one: if you give men enough money to do a job, they'll do it if it kills them. The standard pay for an eight-hour trek into Sunside and back was \$500. That was \$2500 a week for as many weeks as you could stand it.

Some smart young men signed on for Mercury duty, made the trip out—it cost \$1500, deductible from future paychecks if desired—and worked five or six days. Three

days were shot in transportation, but they could clear out with two or three grand anyway, and when they'd spent that they could come back for another two-week tour. Those were the smart ones.

But there were the other ones, the ones who kept promising they'd leave "tomorrow." Tomorrow never came. The lure of that \$500 check at day's end kept bringing them back day after day, for "just one more day." They kept at it until they dropped. Some of them died with hundreds of thousands in the Mercurian bank; Boss Charlie sadly forwarded half their balance to their widows or next of kin, and pocketed the rest.

Then there was a third group—at the moment consisting solely of Roger Courtney. Their pay went straight into Thurston's pocket—and they didn't get any chance to leave. They worked on the desert till the heat killed them.

Which was strictly too bad, of course.

"O KAY, COURTNEY," came the bored voice of the overseer. "Dump your load and take off."

Courtney tripped the release-mechanism and sent the boiling zinc down the chute. The siphon would take it the rest of the way to the teleport and there it would be

demolecularized and hurled outward through space to the receiving-station at Earth or Venus.

"Okay. You're released for the day. The pickup truck will be here any minute."

"Sure," Courtney said. He was half-dizzy with heat. Suit temperature was up to 115° ; outside, a baking 586° prevailed. The ground seemed to shimmer; in Mercury's airlessness, there were no dust molecules in the air to break up the glare. It was merciless. Everything was merciless on this world.

He staggered over to the pickup depot and forced himself to keep standing. If a man wearing a heat-suit fell, he wouldn't be strong enough to pick himself up—and he might fry out there before someone else came along to lift him to his feet.

There were two other miners there already. Courtney recognized them through their faceplates, and weakly nodded in greeting.

"Another day, another \$500, eh, Courtney?"

The man who spoke was "Iron Man" Delavalle. Delavalle had been on Mercury longer than anyone could remember; his bank balance reportedly was up in the millions. Yet he still kept making the daily trek, without any apparent strain. He was a lean, fleshless man who looked as if his skin was made

from old parchment. The sun had long since baked all the fat from his frame.

"Yeah," Courtney said. "How to get rich quick."

The other miner was Paul Crestwick, a thin, pale young man who was on Mercury to pile up a stake to finance his marriage. This was his third day on Sunside, which meant he had just paid off his transportation. From now on, it all was gravy—and he hoped to return to Earth with at least \$3000 in Mercury Mines checks in his pocket.

"Here comes the truck," Crestwick muttered. The heat was taking a terrible toll on him. He was wobbling dizzily and looked ready to fall.

"You birds going back?" the driver said. "Get in, if you are."

The three staggered aboard, and the truck roared off toward Twilight Zone.

They passed through the unnamed valley between the Mountains of Hell — two huge twin peaks, each higher than Everest, standing at the border of Sunside like two monstrous fangs. Temperature began to drop as the truck edged away from the pulsing, swollen sun; shadows grew thicker as they approached Twilight Zone.

Finally they entered the zone of relative coolness, where the sun's

rays did not penetrate but where enough of the broiling radiation from Sunside lapped over to cancel out the deadly cold that lay beyond. The truck pulled up at the airlock that led to the miners' barracks; the three riders got out.

Courtney moved dazedly through the lock, shucked his cumbersome heat-suit, and headed up the escarpment to the two-by-four cabin Thurston had allotted him.

He nudged the photobeam that operated the door. As the door opened, he shambled in and sprawled into the pneumocouch, utterly exhausted.

He stared at his face in the dingy mirror they gave him. The mocking visage of a human skeleton stared back at him.

He had weighed 195 four days ago, when he landed on Mercury. Now, after three days of Sunside duty, he estimated he had lost upwards of twenty pounds — boiled off him by the constant steam-bath conditions inside a heat-suit.

That was about all the fat he had. From now on it would be muscular tissue that would drain away, until he was just skin and bones like some of the other miners. And then one day he'd pitch over in the desert, and —

Damn Thurston!

He was sure Thurston had set up an illicit power-tap. The whole

system suspected it — but no one had any proof. Somewhere on Mercury there was a solar accumulator building up energy, and Thurston had it rigged to a teleport that was shipping it direct to Venus. It was a nice little racket, just as a side-venture. It probably brought Thurston a couple of million a year.

Only there wasn't any way of prosecuting him for it. Not when every man the Solar System Patrol sent to Mercury wound up sent out to Sunside to die.

The door opened.

"Hello, Courtney." It was Ludlow, the lantern-jawed Overseer of the Sunside miners.

"Come to pay me a visit, Ludlow? It's after working hours; I can pick and choose my own company."

"Your working hours never stop, Courtney. If I wanted to I could grab you now and order you out for another eight-hour shift. It's always daylight out on Sunside, you know. No such thing as 'working hours'." There was cold menace in Ludlow's voice.

"You wouldn't!" Courtney said.

"No. I'm not going to. But it's not out of any spirit of mercy — or because I don't want to go back there myself. It's nice and comfy up in the gravcar, you know. But Thurston wouldn't like it if I took

you out for another shift. It would probably kill you — and he wants you to die slowly. He doesn't want to finish you off so fast."

"Thanks for the favor," Courtney snapped. "And now if you'll please get the hell out —"

"Watch your language! You were sassy to me out on the plain today, and that's what I'm here about. I don't take that kind of stuff from no 'one — 'specially guys like you."

LUDLOW STEPPED forward. Courtney watched with icy detachment as the Overseer grabbed him by the throat of his uniform and tugged him to his feet.

"Let go of me, Ludlow."

"When I'm through with you." The Overseer's hand slapped viciously across Courtney's face; the SSP man felt a trickle of blood begin to flow from his cracked, parched lips.

Ludlow's hand connected savagely with his cheek. Courtney's reflexes were dulled by the heat; his mind fought to gain control of his exhausted body. Ludlow was laughing sadistically, as he beat the helpless SSP man.

Suddenly Courtney lashed upward with his fist and connected satisfyingly with Ludlow's chin. The Overseer rocked back, his eyes wide with astonishment. On

Mercury miners were supposed to keep their place — even while an Overseer was giving them a going over.

Courtney felt strength flood back into his tired muscles. He stepped forward, fists first. He had surprise on his side. Ludlow ducked backward as Courtney's balled fist crashed into his face. Another blow ricocheted off the Overseer's chest, leaving him gasping for breath.

"You'll pay for this," Ludlow grated through swelling lips. "You can't do this to —"

"Can't I?" Courtney placed one piledriver blow that sent Ludlow staggering back against the wall. There was a sharp *crack!* as the Overseer hit headfirst — and then he slumped into a huddled heap at the foot of the wall.

Courtney bent over the prostrate Ludlow and efficiently examined him.

The Overseer was dead.

Courtney felt only momentary remorse; it was hard to feel pity for Ludlow or any other member of Thurston's organization. He shuffled through Ludlow's pocket, extracting a nerve-whip and a pass-key. Then he shoved the Overseer under the pneumocouch and straightened up.

Ludlow had been overconfident; he had never expected a tired man

to fight back, and he lay dead as a result. But an SSP man should never be counted out. Not at all.

Three more days on Mercury would probably kill Courtney. But he wasn't figuring on staying on the hellish little planet those three days.

If he could get out of here with some evidence on Thurston —

CAUTIOUSLY he peeked out into the hallway. No one was in sight. Good; Ludlow had come alone.

He closed the door and activated the photon-lock, hoping nobody would come by looking for him. It wasn't likely. No one knew much about him on Mercury but Thurston, and no one cared. So far as the other miners were concerned, he was just some guy looking for quick dough — not an SSP man who had been found out and assigned to a suicide job.

Courtney slipped down the long hallway. Some of the miners had their doors open; he heard them talking, gloating over their bank balances, talking of when they planned to return to Earth, commenting on the heat and the general hellishness of Mercury.

He caught the dropshaft and spun downward to the ground level. There, he entered the lock and donned a breathingsuit. It wasn't

necessary to wear a heat-suit in Twilight Zone, where the temperature was usually moderate, but since there was no atmosphere even here — or anywhere on Mercury — a suit with air-feeder had to be worn.

He stepped outside. A dull glow far to the east was all that was visible of the sun — just enough to keep the Twilight Zone warm. From here he could see the majestic peaks of the Mountains of Hell outlined against the faint redness of the sky. Behind those mountains, he knew, the huge sun blasted down with man-killing fury. Here it was safe.

He glanced the other way. There, to the west, lay Darkside, shrouded in eternal night. Robots mined Darkside, robots whose brains depended on supercooled cryotronic circuits and who thus were scarcely bothered by the Minus 400° temperature there. They brought back frozen gases for use in the Twilight Zone colony.

Up ahead was the main administration building. Somewhere in there was Thurston's office. Inside the spacesuit, Courtney's fingers were curling and uncurling in cold anticipation.

The main airlock of the administration building yawned before him. Courtney entered the compression-chamber, stripped off his

breathing-suit, hung it on the racks that were provided.

Beyond the inner door of the lock stood one of Thurston's private guards. As Courtney emerged from the chamber, the goon pointed at him.

"Where you going, buddy?"

"I have a message from Mr. Ludlow for Mr. Thurston," Courtney said. He started to move past, but a hand grabbed him roughly.

"Hold on, friend. No one gets in there without a pass. Where's yours?"

Courtney chuckled. "Oh—I'm sorry. Here." He fumbled in his pocket and drew out the passkey he had lifted from Ludlow. Cupping the sliver of metal in his hand, he extended it toward the guard.

"What kind of pass is that? I can't see it."

"Take a better look," Courtney said. As the guard squinted and bent over, the SSP man slid the nerve-whip from his pocket and gave him a full dose of electrostim. The guard shuddered. Courtney kept his finger on the stud and the man went into an agonized dance, unable to control his own nerves.

"Hold steady, will you?" Courtney said. "Ah — that's good." He measured the tough for the knockout punch and administered it. The man sagged to the floor.

Courtney gave him another electrostim bath. Even unconscious he writhed in torment.

Chalk off one goon, he thought. That one wouldn't be much good for anything for hours. And by then he should have found Thurston.

HE ENTERED the dropshaft and pinwheeled upward. As he hoped, the shaft halted in mid-ascent and someone got in. Courtney had the nerve-whip drawn instantly.

"That's it — step right in."

"What do *you* want?" The man, Courtney saw, was a mine official.

"I'm looking for Boss Charlie. Tell me where his office is or I'll sizzle your nerves."

"You poor sucker! Don't you know Thurston'll spot you a dozen yards away? You can't get anywhere trying to knock *him* off."

"What do you mean?" Courtney asked, gesturing with the nerve-whip.

"Why, he's got some kind of telepathic Mercurian beast in that box of his. Some sort of heat-leech the robots found on Darkside. It tips him off ahead of time on things. How many miners do you think have tried to kill him in the last ten years?"

So that's it, Courtney thought. So that's how he knew I was SSP!

"I'll take my chances," he said.

"Where's his office?"

"Twenty-third level," the official said. "But you'll never get away with it."

"Let me worry about that. Turn around."

"Are you going to —"

"Yes," Courtney said, and gave the official a full bath of electrostim. The man quivered and collapsed. Courtney dumped him out of the dropshaft and set the dial for the twenty-third level.

He got off and edged stealthily along the corridor. He was going to have to play the rest of the game very carefully, if his opponent was able to read his mind.

The sign on the door said *Charles Thurston, Mine Coordinator*. Courtney lay concealed atop a filing cabinet facing that door, and thought out his strategy.

Thurston was inside. And in that jeweled box on his desk was— what did the fellow say? — a Mercurian heat-leech that read minds and passed the information along to Thurston in time.

That was the way Thurston kept the SSP at arm's length. No matter what the disguise the heat-leech could penetrate it. Three men had died so far in the attempt to expose Thurston's racket; Courtney was determined not to be Number Four.

The question was, at what range

could the thing read minds? And also—how deep could it penetrate?

I'll soon find out, he thought.

He launched a furious burst of thought at the closed door in front of him. *I'm going to ride up to the floor above and jump on him through the skylight. Then I'll grab him by the throat and wrestle with him. Here I am upstairs now. There's the skylight. I'll jump through and —*

He heard the sound of a shot and of breaking glass — and in that instant he grinned and unleashed a barrage of electrostim at Thurston's door.

He sprang from his perch, raced across the hall, and burst into the office, keeping his finger on the firing stud. The plan had worked perfectly. The skylight lay smashed, thanks to Thurston's bullet; the heat-leech had picked up Courtney's false thought and relayed it obediently to its master.

"Hello, Thurston. No, I'm not lying dead on the floor above. I'm right here."

He gave Thurston a quick blast of electrostim; the mine boss jerked convulsively and dropped his gun. Courtney jumped forward.

He smashed a fist into Thurston's pudgy stomach and ducked as the nerve-shocked mine boss aimed a clumsy return punch.

Thurston staggered; he rocked backward, and seemed about to topple. The mine boss' strength seemed fantastic, in view of the dose Courtney had thrown at him with the nerve-whip.

"Okay, you've got me," Thurston said moaningly. "Don't turn that whip on me again."

"Just stay down there and keep your hands where I can see them. I want to investigate this."

Courtney turned to examine the box in which the heat-leech was kept. Suddenly a quiet mental voice said, *He's got a knife.*

He whirled and saw something bright flashing in Thurston's hands. A quick blast of electrostim and the knife went clattering to the floor. Thurston stared at him in shock.

"How did you know —?"

"Your little pet told me," Courtney said. "It knows a loser when it sees one. It left you like a rat leaves a sinking ship. Except *you're* the rat."

He scooped up the heat-leech's box and glanced at Thurston. "Hmm. That's another charge we can get you on when I get you back to Earth. Discovery of an alien life-form, and failure to report same."

Thurston glared at him defiantly. "You'll never prove anything!"

"I don't need to," Courtney

said. "A quick mind-probe will settle the whole thing. All the evidence we need is locked up in the brain of the heat-leech here —

enough to smash your lousy racket and put you away for keeps. Come on, Thurston — let's get moving."

THE END



"Holy galaxy! — what a population!"

★ *Orbits In Space* ★

IN INTERPLANETARY SPACE you simply don't go from one point to another - - instead you calculate a suitable orbit and then follow it. This fundamental law of celestial mechanics often causes considerable confusion. "Why," is often asked, "can't I go from the Earth to Mars along a straight line?" Aside from the matter of relative velocities, in which the target is travelling so rapidly that you have to aim ahead of it, there is the matter of limited fuel supply to do work against a gravitational field. This fact, stubborn though it is, requires that you traverse an elliptical orbit.

It depends on the fundamental law of gravitation of Newton. Every two bodies in the universe attract each other with a force proportional to their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. If you think only in two dimensional terms and regard the Solar System as a vast pool table with the space ship and the planet represented by billiard balls, and you assume the Newtonian condition, you can set up the mathematical equations for their interaction.

If you introduce scale velocities, your "spaceships" will invariably travel elliptical paths under an initial arbitrary motion. True, you can make the billiard balls collide with one taking the path of a straight

line, but this represents doing a tremendous amount of excess work against gravitation, and still on scale, you do not have the fuel to permit this.

Therefore it is a maxim that you must traverse elliptical orbits when you pilot a spaceship if you expect to use the minimum fuel.

When the satellite is launched during the forthcoming Geophysical Year, it will encircle the Earth in a distended elliptical orbit, just as the Moon does, and just as every planetary body does. A perfectly circular orbit, geometrically speaking is a sort of ellipse, but this is an ellipse of constant potential, from which you neither rise nor fall - - or from which you go nowhere.

A rocket going to Mars will travel the ellipse. So will one going to the Moon. A study of conic sections as the circle, ellipse, parabola and hyperbola are called will quickly show you the precise reasons for flight in a gravitational field. Gravity is like a huge yoke with which we have been laden, and so being unable to fight it, we compromise, using it where we can, spending fuel against it where we cannot.

It's a good thing that the computing machines are already designed. The complexity of these orbits can be very great and no man could compute them in the time allotted a given flight.

Alex Mayne knew somebody wanted to keep him out of the spacelanes. And that could only mean someone was afraid he'd learn about the—

HOT TRIP FOR VENUS

by

Randall Garrett

THE CARGO SHIP *Lightfoot* stood poised at the end of the Nevada Flats spaceport, ready to blast off. At its controls Alex Mayne ran down the final check watching lights click on and off as he tallied the fuel, checked the computer, cleared the orbit.

"Okay, Central, I'm ready," he said finally. He put his fingers lightly on the blasting panel, waiting for clearance. "Am awaiting go-ahead."

"Hold it up, Mayne," a voice from the control tower told him. "We're still checking some things."

Mayne tapped his fingers impatiently against the panel. "Okay, I'll wait. But my orbit's only got a tolerance of three minutes, so hurry it up."

A moment later, the radio crackled again. "Sorry, Mayne, but you'll have to get out of that ship. You can't take off."

"What?"

"That's right," the impersonal voice said. "We're sending Relief Pilot Anderson to Venus in your place. Report here immediately."

"Why?" Mayne asked. "What the hell's wrong? I've got flight clearance for this, and if you louse up my orbit - -"

"I'm sorry, Mayne, but you *don't* have flight clearance. Your blast-off certificate's been revoked."

For a moment, Mayne froze, not thinking of moving. His blastoff certificate revoked? Impossible! A spaceman without a certificate was like a singer without a voice, like an athlete without legs, like a painter without eyes. Finished . . .

His lips tightened. "Look here, Central. There's no reason why anything like that should happen. I'm leaving in exactly thirty seconds. *One. Two.*"

"*Hold it, Mayne!* You take that



ship off the ground and we'll blast you out of the skies. This is a direct order: get out of that ship and report to Administration."

Mayne's fingers hovered over the blasting keys and stayed there as indecision gripped him. Central was right - - if he made an unauthorized blastoff, they'd track him and blow him to molecules quick enough - - and even if he got away, he'd be finished as a pilot from that moment on.

He glanced out the viewplate and saw his relief coming toward him over the field, accompanied by a couple of other men. That clinched it. If he blasted off now, the heat of his jets would kill three innocent men. It would be premeditated murder.

Mayne heard someone banging at the airlock, and a faint, tinny cry of "Open up!"

"Okay," he yelled disgustedly. "I'm opening."

He pressed the stud that operated the lock mechanism and it swung open. Don Anderson, the lanky young relief pilot, entered, with two other men that Mayne recognized as groundside mechanics.

"Hello, Mayne," Anderson said self consciously. "They tell me I'm making this run for you."

"So I hear," Mayne said, measuring himself against the other. "I'd like to know what for."

Anderson shrugged. "Beats me. I just do what they tell me. Bud and Joe here'll escort you over to Central. Seems they want to see you about something."

Mayne nodded and got ready. He calculated that if he could somehow overpower the three of them and tie them up, he could check out in Anderson's name. He *had* to make this run. He *had* to - -

"You'll have to recalculate the orbit," he said. "Mine's no good now. Come over here, and I'll show you."

Anderson stepped toward Mayne, who rocketed a punch up from his knees that sent the relief pilot staggering backward. Mayne followed with a right below the heart, and turned to confront the two mechanics.

They came at him from both sides. He landed a couple of good punches, then felt a fist slide past his guard and thud into his stomach, and another catch him off the cheekbone and spin his head around. Dizzily he tried to fight them off, but he couldn't manage the job. They went over him very efficiently for almost a minute, until he put up his hand weakly. "Okay! Lay off!"

"You going to come without a fight, now?"

"I'll come," Mayne said bitterly.

One of the mechanics turned to Anderson, who was fingering a

swelling lump on the side of his jaw. "You all right?"

"I'll manage," the relief pilot said. "Get him out of here and let me get going on my run."

Mayne scowled. "This is a put-up job, Anderson. You're not going to let them yank away my certificate like that, are you?"

"Listen, Mayne, this isn't *my* idea," Anderson said. "I take what assignments I get."

"Come on," one of the mechanics growled. "Let's go, Tarzan. This crate has to take off, and we can't wait on you."

HE LET THEM half-drag, half-push him across the dark expanse of the spacefield toward the gleaming needle of the Administration Building at the far end of the field. Once they crossed the red line that marked the danger zone, Mayne saw a bright flash of light spring from the dome of Administration, signalling clearance.

The *Lightfoot* spouted flame and rose on a noisy jet barrage, hung frozen for a moment, then vanished Venusward. Mayne watched it go.

My ship, he thought dismally. There goes my ship, and I'm not on it. I've been grounded.

The word was like dirt in his mouth. *Grounded*. Now, of all times to be grounded, when so much hung on this flight, when so much desperate urgency rode

behind it. He stared upward at the place where his ship had been, then turned and let the mechanics take him to Administration.

He entered the Administration Building, passed through the doors that opened at his approach, and into Routing Control. A man in Universal Spacelines uniform looked up at him as he entered.

"You the router I was just speaking to?"

The man nodded. "Are you Alex Mayne?"

"Damned right I am! What's this business about, anyway?"

The router spread his hands apologetically, then reached into his desk and drew forth a crisp memo slip. Up at the top, the imprint was that of B. J. Connaughty, head of Universal Airlines. Underneath that, a short message was typed in neat green letters.

To The Router:

Please be informed that the blastoff certificate of pilot Alexander Mayne is hereby cancelled, effective immediately. This means that Pilot Mayne is not to make his scheduled run in our ship Lightfoot this evening, nor is he to make any further space journeys. He is to be considered permanently grounded.

*B. J. Connaughty,
President*

Mayne stared at the note for a moment, then returned it to the router. "Okay," he said hoarsely. "My certificate's been cancelled. I've been yanked from my run." He licked his lips. "Why?"

"I can't tell you, Mr. Mayne." *Note the Mister*, Mayne thought. *I'm just another planetlubber now.* "You'll have to take that matter upstairs. I'm sure they can help you."

"Upstairs?"

"Records office. Look up your certificate - - there's bound to be a reason for cancellation."

"You're right. I'll check right now."

"Good luck, Mr. Mayne."

"Sure," Mayne said. "Sure. Thanks loads."

He went upstairs. The records office was on the twenty-ninth level of the giant building, and the night recordskeeper smiled blankly at him as he entered.

"My name is Mayne," he said. "Pilot first class. My certificate's just been cancelled, and I want to know why the hell why."

"Very well," the recordskeeper said. "M-A-Y-N-E, is it?"

"M-A-Y-N-E. Alexander Mayne. A-L-E-X-A. - "

"That's all right, sir." The recordskeeper disappeared into a vast stack of computer tapes, set some sort of machine whirring, and returned a few moments later with

a punched card that Mayne recognized as his certificate.

"Here you are, sir."

Mayne took the card, which was stamped CANCELLED in bright red, and scanned it. On the back, it said, under "Reason for Revoke-ment," DISCHARGED ON MEDICAL GROUNDS. Appended to that was a handwritten scribble that said, "Failed quarterly reflex test. No longer fit for space hauling. Recommendation: ground work in the Company. Good service record."

Mayne stared bleakly at the card, then looked at the recordskeeper. "This is baloney," he said quietly.

"Sir?"

"I said baloney! I passed my Quarterly by plus ten. Get me my testing records, will you?"

"Of course, sir."

Mayne waited impatiently. There was some clerical error involved here, obviously; he had the duplicate of his record home, with his pass-card for the last Quarterly. He had the proof. It only needed to be passed through channels, and he'd be back in space again.

"Here you are, sir," the recordskeeper said. He handed Mayne a thick portfolio which contained his medical reports over the last five years, covering his period in service as a pilot. He riffled through them impatiently, thumbing over the little yellow Quarterly cards

that told of his fitness to pilot a ship.

"July, October, January, April - ah, here we are." He pulled out the July card, the one covering his most recent examination, and held it between nerveless fingers.

The card was red. Bright red.

It was a failing card.

And he *knew* he had passed that exam.

"Here," he said. "Take the whole batch away."

"Is there anything else I can get you, sir?"

Mayne shook his head. "No. It doesn't matter, now." He turned and left, walking out into the corridor, standing there staring at the bright lights that lined the halls, not knowing where to turn next.

The card said he failed. He *hadn't* failed.

He'd lost his certificate. He was through as a space man.

The answer was obvious. It was a frame — someone wanted to keep him out of space. Someone wanted to keep him away from Venus permanently. Someone knew what Alex Mayne had intended to do as soon as he got back to Venus again.

He sank down on a bench in the hall. Where do you turn now, when every avenue is blocked?

IT MUST HAVE BEEN on his last run to Venus in the *Light-foot*, six weeks before, that he'd seen the peculiarly glassy look in the eyes of the Greenie.

The small Venusian had been standing alone in the middle of the forest, staring meditatively at a *gort-bush* whose rainbow spines were weaving ever closer to it. Mayne had been making the trip from Venusport to New Chicago to pick up his cargo vouchers when he came across him.

The Greenie was waiting for the *gort-bush* to grab him, and he wasn't making any attempt to resist. Mayne sprang from his land-car, covered the twenty feet of swampy bog between him and the Greenie in a few quick bounds, and incinerated the *gort-bush*. Then he turned to the Greenie.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked, in *lingua spacia*. "You looking to die young?"

The Greenie only shook its head blankly from side to side. Mayne reached out, joggled it back and forth in an attempt to awaken it — and saw the glassy way its eyes were fixed, staring forward. It was the goggle-eyed look of the *kerith*-addict.

Kerith? On Venus? The Plutonian drug was forbidden by the most stringent laws in the galaxy — and who would sell it to the simple-minded Venusians? Who

would be that low? It was like selling the stuff to children.

"Wake up!" Mayne yelled, slapping the Greenie hard. The Venusian only moaned, and backed away. Shrugging, Mayne slugged the small humanoid and dumped him in the back of his landcar. He proceeded on to New Chicago, and took care of his business there.

His next stop was going to be the local Medical Office, to have the Greenie checked over, to have the diagnosis of *kerith*-drugging confirmed. Only — when he returned to the landcar, there was no Greenie there. Just a ripped-off bit of gray material that could be only one thing — a fragment of a Universal Spacelines pilot's uniform.

And the only pilot currently on Venus besides Mayne was Brian Connaughty. The son of B. J. Connaughty, the President of the Company.

Mayne could not stop to investigate. His schedule had called for blastoff later that afternoon, and there wasn't any way he could deviate from that.

So Brian Connaughty was selling *kerith* to the Greenies, eh? He didn't have any proof, of course, but it certainly looked that way — and Mayne wouldn't put anything past wiry, unscrupulous Brian.

Mayne had planned to look for

proof on his next trip up, six weeks in the future. It was a week-long stay next time, and he'd have ample time to smoke out this *kerith* peddler, whether he was Connaughty or anyone else.

Not now. Not any more. Apparently Connaughty knew that Mayne was aware of what was going on, and it hadn't been too hard for Brian to get access to the records to juggle the medical reports, to get Mayne's certificate rescinded.

He'd never get back to Venus now. No one would listen to a grounded spaceman, in the first place, and in the second place he couldn't afford the million-credit fee for a private trip to Venus. There was no way he'd be able to stop Connaughty's *kerith*-racket.

He would never be able to prove fraud, either — not when he had B. J. and Brian against him. His protest would never get anywhere. He'd never get his certificate back.

Damn you, Connaughty!

Right now, Brian was probably on Venus, selling his weed to the unsuspecting Greenies. And Mayne was permanently Earthed. Permanently.

Mayne got up and began to walk aimlessly down the long corridor toward the elevator. There was no further point sticking around here, he thought. He was washed-up. Through. *Kaput.*

Suddenly, the warning signal

sounded from the field below. Mayne stiffened automatically, as years of piloting had taught him, and then he relaxed as he realized the signal could not possibly be for him.

The distant boom of the field speaker came through to him. "*Flight 129 for Venus loading cargo now. Pilot Eric Carpenter report to field flight assignment.*"

It was the second run of the night, cargo haul and mail, most likely. Mayne could picture the scene in the Pilot's Lounge now, as Carpenter got himself ready for the run, the run that Mayne would never make again.

Then he stopped, as a thought struck him. *Why not*, he thought. *Why not try it? I've got nothing to lose.*

With sudden urgency, he sprinted down the hall to the elevator.

FLIGHT 129 was the cargo ship *Arthur Clarke*, and it stood outlined against the night beacons down at the end of the field. Mayne stood in the shadows and watched the leather-jacketed figure of Pilot Eric Carpenter crossing the field, heading for the ship.

Sorry, Eric, he thought. Skirting the edge of the field, he ran along the shadows toward the *Arthur Clarke*. Carpenter climbed the catwalk and entered the ship just as Mayne arrived at the blasting area.

He glanced around. There was just one guard on duty, watching over the loaded cargo until Carpenter took over. Mayne stepped up behind him.

"Excuse me," he said. "How long is it to blastoff?"

The guard turned. "Oh, about ten min - -"

Mayne's fist met the guard's jaw squarely. The guard toppled and hit the concrete of the field with a dull *thwack*. He tried to get up, and Mayne bent and hit him again, sharply. He lay still.

Then he turned and ran toward the *Clarke*. He mounted the catwalk and pounded on the airlock.

"Carpenter! Carpenter! Open up!"

From inside, he heard the pilot's voice say, "What's the matter? Something wrong?"

"Yeah! Open up!"

The hatch swung open and Mayne entered. Carpenter was busily making the routine last minute checks.

"Mayne! What are *you* doing here? I heard you - -"

"- - were grounded. Strictly baseless rumors. I'm here to replace you on this flight."

"What? What kind of business is this? I'll have to have confirmation from Central."

He reached for the radio control, and Mayne jumped. He tackled the pilot and wrenched him

away from the control panel. Carpenter squirmed, got an arm free, and drove a fist into Mayne's teeth.

Mayne wiped blood away. "Listen, Eric, don't make this any harder than it has to be. I want your ship."

"Get out of here, Mayne."

Carpenter flashed out, but Mayne spun away and connected with the other's chin. Carpenter sagged, and Mayne hit him again. The pilot's head snapped back and struck a projecting control stud.

Mayne scooped up the crumpled body and carried it back to the cargo hold, where he strapped it securely in one of the fragile-goods lockers. He had nothing against Carpenter, who was just an innocent bystander, and he didn't want anything to happen to the pilot on the way out.

Moving quickly, he recomputed the orbit to include the extra mass of a second man, and signalled Central.

"Eric Carpenter," he said, imitating the other's voice as well as possible. "Request blastoff clearance."

"The go-ahead's forthcoming, Carpenter."

"Good. I'll be waiting."

The signal beacon lit a few seconds later. Mayne got verbal confirmation and pounded down on the blastoff keys. A moment later, the *Arthur Clarke* rose from the field,

destination Venus.

IT WAS A NINE-HOUR trip. Carpenter came to about halfway out, and Mayne cut in the automatic pilot and headed aft to see how the pilot was.

Quickly, he explained to Carpenter just why he had stolen the ship, leaving out any positive identification of the dope-pushers he suspected.

"You'll never get away with it," Carpenter said. "The Company'll smear you for hijacking the ship."

"I didn't hijack it, though," Mayne said. "As far as they know, you took it out. And I'm going to turn command over to you again once we put down on Venus. You can take care of the cargo handling. I'm going to do a little scouting work."

"I think you're crazy," Carpenter said, rubbing his bruised head. "But I'll keep my mouth shut, anyway. Tell me, though — why are you so hopped up about keeping the Greenies pure and healthy?"

"I don't give a damn about the Greenies," Mayne said. "Not particularly — though I can't say I care much for the idea of selling them *kerith*. But I've got a personal stake in this thing. If I can uncover the peddlers, I can get back my certificate."

That was all there was to it. If he could unmask Connaughty, he'd

smash Universal and entitle himself to a formal protest of the rescinding order. If not — well, then he was no worse off than before.

He returned to the controls, and watched the cloud-blanketed surface of Venus growing larger and larger in the viewplate.

They landed four hours later, and Mayne, true to his word, turned the controls over to Carpenter. "Just forget I ever came aboard," he said. "It'll look better for both of us. When are you blasting off for Earth?"

"I'll be here a week."

"Good," Mayne said. "Don't leave without me, huh?"

"I'm not making any promises," said Carpenter.

Mayne nodded — it was the best he expected — and turned away. He left the spaceport and headed out into the hot, lush Venusian afternoon. The air was warm and moist with the ever-present rain-that-never-fell, and the thick vegetation was a riot of color before his eyes.

If he returned empty-handed, the Company had him. One word from Connaughty and he didn't stand a chance of having his case reviewed.

But if he could come back with evidence that Connaughty, father and son, were busily peddling *kerith* to the Greenies — then, and only then, did Mayne stand a

chance of getting cleared of the frameup and returning to space.

He plunged off into the jungle, not knowing where to begin but knowing he had to make a beginning. He passed a thicket of waving *dornik*-trees, undulating with a sinister motion, and pushed his way through the closely-massed vines and bunched, low-lying shrubs.

The glow of the sun behind the cloud layer grew brighter as he headed deeper into the jungle. It was well past noon before he stumbled over the Greenie village.

An elderly Greenie who might have been the chieftain came out to greet him.

"Are you from the trading post?"

"No," Mayne said. "I'm searching for another Earthman. Thin, with red hair and ugly face. Do you know him?"

"He is the one who sells dreams?" the Greenie asked.

"Yes! That's the one!"

"To the West," the old Venusian said. "He has passed through here, and has gone west."

"Thank you, father," Mayne said. He peered closely and saw now that the old native had the glazed expression of the confirmed *kerith*-addict. Connaughty had been through here, all right.

Mayne cut a walking-stick from one of the few trees that didn't seem to be carnivorous, and headed onward toward the west. There was

another village some eleven miles from where he was; it was a miserable trek, but he knew he had to make it.

It took hours. Mayne was ready to drop by the time he saw signs of the village. He found it, at last — and he found Brian Connaughty.

The Earthman was sitting in the square in the center of the village, and several of the Greenies were grouped around him, strumming on the taut-skinned native drums. Mayne walked right up to them.

"Hello, Brian."

"Mayne! How did you — I mean, good to see you, fellow! Just arrive?"

"The *Lightfoot* pulled in a couple of hours before," Mayne said truthfully. "You collecting folkways out here in the tribal area?"

"I'm — I'm doing this as a sort of hobby," Connaughty said. "You spend enough time on Venus and you want to know something about the people. Damned interesting people, these Greenies."

"I'm sure they are," Mayne said tightly. "That must be why you're so happy to sell them *kerith*."

Connaughty's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean by that, Mayne? That's a pretty strong accusation."

"And I can back it up," Mayne lied. "I've got proof — conclusive proof. I can put down documentary evidence that says you've been dop-

ing the Greenies."

Connaughty's pale eyes blazed. "That's a lie!"

"That's another," Mayne said evenly. "Where's your *kerith-cache*?"

Connaughty didn't answer. Instead, he sprang from the ground, leaped straight at Mayne's throat. Mayne rocked for a moment under the sudden assault, then yanked Connaughty's hand from his throat and stepped back. The Greenies arrayed themselves around the struggling pair interestedly.

Connaughty's fists tatooed Mayne's stomach. The *kerith*-peddler was a smaller man than Mayne, but more agile, and Mayne was hard put to fend off Connaughty's attack.

He pushed away, breaking the clinch, and aimed an open-handed slap that split Connaughty's lip. Then he strode in, ignoring Connaughty's shower of light bodyblows, and drove two heavy punches into the other's midsection. Connaughty grunted and gave ground,

Mayne reached out, pinioned his arms, and lifted Connaughty from the ground.

"What do you want from me?" Connaughty asked.

Mayne only chuckled. "I want to see you rot in jail," he said.

"You'll never get anything from me," Connaughty said. "I don't care how hard you beat me up."

"I'm not going to beat you up." Mayne glanced around, saw what he wanted, bent, and heaved the scrambling body of Connaughty up — into the welcoming grasp of a *chlora*-tree.

"Mayne! This is murder!"

"I know," Mayne said calmly.

"Get me out and I'll confess everything!" Connaughty pleaded. The acid of the tree's suckers was starting to burn into him now.

"What do you mean, 'everything'?" Mayne asked with calm curiosity. "Be more specific."

Connaughty's face contorted with pain. "That my father and I were smuggling dope in on the cargo

ships. That we framed you to keep you from coming back here and finding out what we were doing. That we — God! Get me out of this! You can't just let me die in this tree, Mayne!"

He watched as Connaughty writhed. The *chlora*-tree had wrung from Connaughty what no beating ever would — a full confession. Mayne smiled happily and drew his blaster.

"Keep your eyes shut," he ordered. "I'm going to cook this tree before it eats you alive. I want there to be some of you left to stand trial when we get back to Earth!"



Brant's job was to check the robot relays on tiny stations scattered through space. It was not his job to risk death after an attack from—

Pirates Of The Void

by

Ivar Jorgensen

WAYNE BRANT HUDDLED tensely in the rack of spacesuits, down in the storage hold of Planetoid Relay Station 3391, pretending to be just another spacesuit and hoping desperately that the man with the gun in his hand wouldn't notice anything odd about this one suit.

The man with the gun looked casually around the storeroom, his face set grimly. Brant struggled to keep his eyes from blinking, to keep his body from making any kind of motion that would reveal his location.

Suddenly, another man appeared at the door of the storeroom.

"Anybody in here, Bert?" the newcomer asked, his voice reverberating loudly in the quiet relay station.

"Not that I can see," the man with the gun said. He looked around the brightly-lit room once more, his eyes passing over Brant with-

out noticing him. Shrugging, he turned to the man at the door. "Nobody here. I guess the station is empty, all right."

"All these subradio relay stations are 'robot controlled', the other said. 'There wouldn't be anyone here unless there was an emergency.'" He chuckled harshly. "Who'd want to live on an airless asteroid a light year from the nearest planet?"

The man called Bert grinned and holstered the gun. "Okay, the place is clean. There'll be trouble soon enough—let's hope we don't run into anything we don't expect."

"Don't worry. When the Colonel figures out a job, he covers every angle. Now let's go; he's waiting for us in the control booth. We haven't too much time."

I don't have too much time either. Wayne thought. He slackened his taut posture in relief as the two left the store room.



It had been a near thing, and it wasn't over yet. The danger was just beginning. In a way, he thought, he was both lucky and unlucky. If he hadn't made it to the storeroom in time—

But that didn't matter now. He had made it. His problem now was to stay alive on a station less than half a mile in diameter. That was the first job. To stay alive.

There was also the problem of who these pirates who had taken over the station were, what they wanted, and what—if anything—Wayne Brant could do to stop them. Uneasily, he tensed his arm muscles. It would be eight days before the pickup ship would be here to get him. Eight days. He couldn't hide for eight days. Flexing his tired arms, he realized he

couldn't remain hanging in the spacesuit rack another five minutes, let alone eight days.

SERGEANT WAYNE BRANT was a subradio technician for the ISC—the Interstellar Spaceways Commission, the semi-military organization that regulated interstellar travel and communications. His job was to make periodic checkups on the relay stations that dotted this sector of the Galaxy.

Normally, a robot station should be able to function and repair itself for fifty years without a check, and if anything did go wrong, there would be an alarm sent to the nearest ISC base.

But even the best of robots can make mistakes. If the alarm failed, or the error were too slight to send an alarm—a thousand things *could* happen. And that was why Wayne Brant had to go from one to another—just checking. He'd been doing it for five years without running into anything but minor troubles—until now.

Well, he thought to himself, straining his ears to pick up the sound of the pirates in the station, *When I run into trouble, it's a doozie!*

Brant had been dropped off on Planetoid Relay Station 3391 by an ICS ship. It took better than

ten days to check a relay station, section by section, so the ship would not be back until then. Eight more days, on Planetoid 3391, swinging in airless space a few hundred million miles from a blue-white star. The star had no planets; it floated alone in space except for a few insignificant asteroids.

The pirates had come an hour before. The smallspacer had settled itself to the surface of PRS 3391 and clamped itself there with metamagnetic anchors. Then, Wayne remembered, a call had come over the radio.

"PRS 3391, this is ISC Ship 54; is anyone there?"

Brant had been surprised. ISC ships weren't in the habit of making unscheduled calls. Still, he had thought the spacer was telling the truth; the ship certainly looked like a Commission ship. But he had dismantled the transmitter for a checkup and had been unable to answer.

The call was repeated. This time, Brant decided to signal by blinker light from the porthole.

And then the voice had said: "No answer, Colonel. There's no one there."

"We'll go in then," had come the faint reply. "If there *is* anyone there, kill them."

And Sergeant Wayne Brant had

known he was trapped. He carried no armament—a repair technician had no need for it. He could only hide.

But where?

He had decided on the space-suits for two reasons. Besides being a good hiding place—they wouldn't suspect one suit out of several—the suits would afford protection. The pirates couldn't get in without blowing open the airlock and letting the air out.

Moving quickly, Brant had run toward the storeroom, taken one of the suits, climbed into it, and then hung himself back on the rack with the rest. The heavy light filters in the helmet made it look black from the outside. He could see out, but no one could see in.

And then the pirates had entered. There had been no explosion, no rush of air from the airlock. That had surprised Brant. He had been even more surprised when the pirates came in without suits on. Evidently, the man who called himself The Colonel had been able to get the combination of the photonic lock that opened the outer door.

The ship they had landed in carried a crew of four—but more could have been aboard. Anyhow, Brant knew, there were at least four pirates aboard the tiny relay station—and he faced quick death if any of them found him first.

HIS ARMS ACED. He had to get down from the space-suit rack, or he'd cry out in pain and end the conflict before it had begun. He decided to quit his hiding-place. He couldn't hide for eight days; he'd have to handle the situation actively if he wanted to stay alive.

Carefully, Brant eased himself down and stepped over to the door. The space station was utterly quiet; evidently the intruders were up ahead, in the communications room. He paused nervously in the storage hold.

Suddenly, an idea occurred. Next to the main storage room, there was a smaller room also used for storage—a room which contained a circuit-panel. There were many of these circuit-panels scattered throughout the station. They could be opened to expose the circuits of the robot machinery in order to repair them. As a repair technician, Wayne was as familiar with the circuits of a relay station as he was with the letters of his own name.

If he could get into this adjoining room and open up that panel, he could tune in on whatever was being said in the communications room. *If.*

He stepped outside into the bright corridor. A stocky man with close-clipped brown hair, a dull-

gray uniform, and a thick black pistol strapped to his hip stood outside it, staring coolly off into the distance.

Brant took three quick steps, clamped a hand down on the man's shoulder, whirled him around.

"Who—?"

That was all. Brant ripped a savage right to the man's chin and he slumped to the floor. Moving quickly, Brant dragged him back inside the main storeroom, dumped him behind a packing-case, shut off the lights, and slammed the door. Then he returned to the adjoining room.

He entered and speedily found the panel in the wall. He slid the panel aside and located two of the trace leads. Working carefully, he plugged in his helmet phones, and then shorted through an actuator switch which turned on one of the sonic pickups in the communications room.

"—*Get them here. That will be the easiest.*"

It was the voice of one of the pirates.

"*That's well enough,*" said another voice smoothly, "*but we'll do it my way; I happen to know what I'm doing.*"

"*Sure, Colonel, sure,*" said the first voice apologetically.

There was silence for a moment. Brant wondered what they were up to. The Colonel—if it was the

same man, this "Colonel" was responsible for half a thousand robberies in the galaxy over the past years. And now what?

There came the sound of radio dials being turned. The pirates were preparing to send a message.

"*Interstellar liner Thannis — liner Thannis, do you read me?*"

"*We read you,*" came the reply after a pause. "*Identify, please.*"

The *Thannis*! Brant sucked his breath in sharply. The Colonel believed in going for big game, evidently.

Brant had seen the routing sheets for the giant liner; he knew what was aboard. It carried a cargo of Valdusian *narconite*, worth a fortune. *Narconite*, in carefully-controlled doses, was used as an antidote to ordinary sense-deadening drugs such as morphine. In overdose, though, it heightened perception and at the same time suppressed inhibitions — making it the galaxy's most desirable narcotic, and most valuable.

"*This is Sergeant Wayne Brant aboard Planetoid Relay Station 3391,*" the pirate's voice continued. "*We compute that you'll be passing near Giador, the local sun, in your route. Will you be able to stop off at the relay station to pick up a special cargo for ISC?*"

The radioman aboard the liner was silent for a moment, then replied: "*We'll make the detour as*

requested."

Brant heard a click as the sub-radio set was shut off. The message was complete; the trap had been set. The Colonel's voice came again. *"Excellent. Now we wait for the Thannis; it should be —"*

"All right, you! Put up your hands!"

The voice came from directly behind him, not from the phones that were tapped into the communications circuit. Brant realized that he had allowed himself to become so absorbed in the tapped conversation that he had forgotten to keep an eye out for patrolling pirates.

He turned and leaped in the same instant toward the man who stood at the door. Taken by surprise, the pirate was unable to fire the pistol. He yelled. Brant's fist smacked into the man's midsection, and the pirate grunted in pain. Another punch; the man swung around.

Then, with savage force, he brought the butt of his pistol down on the side of Wayne's helmet. Brant reeled and toppled backward, then barely managed to hold his balance. But it was too late to regain the offensive. There was a heavy, black-snouted Brekmann Twelve in the pirate's hand, pointed straight at Brant.

The pirate walked over to Wayne and searched him with one hand,

keeping the deadly pistol levelled at his midsection. Then he reached out and jerked the helmet phone leads out of the circuit.

"Let's take a walk," he said. "I think the Colonel will want to see you."

THE COLONEL WAS A TALL, lean, ascetic-looking man with a mild mouth and cold, heavy-lidded eyes. He looked up as Wayne marched into the room ahead of the pirate.

"Ah, the technician," he said smoothly. "I knew you were here as soon as I saw your testing equipment." He gestured at the small kit that lay open on the floor near the console bank.

Then he looked at the pirate, and shook his head regretfully. "I thought I told you to kill him, Bert."

"But — maybe you wanted to talk to him first," the pirate stammered. "He was doing something with the equipment back there. Maybe we ought to know what it was." He told the Colonel what he had seen.

The heavy-lidded eyes frowned in concentration. "I believe you're right, Bert. Take his helmet off and tie his hands behind him."

The helmet was unfastened, and as two of the men tied his hands behind him, Wayne said, "You're going to get caught pretty quickly

after you pull this. You know that, don't you?"

The Colonel allowed a faint smile to cross his face. "The technician talks to gain time, I see. I know what you're thinking, young man: after the robbery, the *Thannis* will be found missing. The ISC will check along her route and find the message sent from here, which is recorded inside the robot where I can't get at it. Eh?"

Brant stared stonily without making reply. The Colonel smiled again. "Unfortunately," he said, "that isn't what will happen. The *Thannis* will have a regrettable accident. It will smash into this planetoid — and the resulting explosion, I'm afraid, is going to destroy all the evidence. The ISC won't even know that the narconite is missing." The eyes narrowed. "Did you think I'd plan something like this without taking all these matters into account?"

Wayne's lips curled derisively. He opened his mouth to reply, but before he could say anything the Colonel's palm lashed out, cracking against his cheek.

"Don't speak unless you're spoken to." The Colonel's voice was still calm. "I have no desire to be tied up in fatuous conversation. Suppose you tell me, now: what were you doing back there in the storeroom?"

"Listening to what was going on

in here," Wayne said truthfully, knowing the Colonel wouldn't believe anything so simple as the truth.

The Colonel flicked a finger and Bert's fist lashed out, catching Wayne on the point of his jaw. Wayne saw it coming and rolled with it. He had already picked the spot where he wanted to land.

The blow hurt. Wayne staggered back against one wall and slid down to a sitting position, as though Bert's fist had dazed him.

The Colonel stepped over to him. "Don't lie. I want to know what you were doing."

"Just what I said," Wayne told him, making his voice sound as though he were dazed and groggy.

Bert stepped forward to kick at Wayne's ribs, but the Colonel waved him back.

"That's not the way. We don't have that much time. The *Thannis* will be here in twenty minutes." He surveyed the room with his eyes, stopping as he saw Wayne's tool kit. Wayne stiffened. The Colonel's cold eyes sparkled a little, and a flicker of a smile crossed his face.

He walked over to the kit, picked it up, opened it, and began sorting through the tools and test equipment. After a moment, he pulled out an instrument that looked something like a pistol and looked at it thoughtfully.

"I think this will do," he said reflectively.

Wayne, meanwhile, had been working furiously. His hands were behind his back, and his back was against the wall — the wall which contained another panel that opened to the robot circuits of the relay station. If he could get that panel open —

The Colonel hefted the pistol-like thing in his hand. "Yes, indeed. I think this will do admirably."

"What is it, Colonel?" asked one of the men.

The Colonel looked at Wayne as he answered; "It's a welding gun — for welding tungsten plate. At the orifice, it has a temperature of well over six thousand degrees."

He pulled the trigger. A glowing ball of white light appeared at the tip of the muscle. "That will cut through almost anything — including bone," the Colonel said, his voice low and even. He locked the trigger into place and stepped toward Wayne.

And it was that step that completely reversed the situation.

WAYNE HAD FINALLY opened the small panel at his back, and his groping, sensitive fingers had found the leads to the paragravity unit. Like all relay stations, Planetoid 3391 was small,

less than half a mile in diameter — and therefore its surface gravity was almost negligible. Only the paragravity unit below the relay station kept normal grav within.

As the Colonel stepped forward, Wayne jerked the leads loose from their terminals, cutting the power flow from the paragravity unit.

Suddenly, everything in the station became almost weightless. The Colonel's step, instead of just pushing him forward a few feet, catapulted him up and forward, slamming him against the wall over Wayne's head.

The others, too, were in trouble. When a man is standing still, his leg muscles are braced to support the weight of his body; when that weight is removed, the reflex action of the legs lifts him automatically, as though he had jumped. The pirates were floating in the air.

They tried to draw their guns, but the jerk of their arms started them spinning, and made aiming difficult. Wayne grinned at the sight of the pinwheeling pirates.

But he had other things to worry about. The welding gun, its muzzle still glowing with the white ball of heat, had dropped from the Colonel's hand and was drifting down toward Wayne's head. Held as it was by the globular forcefield, there was little heat radiation from the sphere of light,

but if it should touch his skin —

He eased himself to one side, being careful not to move too fast and thus put himself in the same predicament as the airborne pirates. Then he held his hands out behind him, directly in the path of the slowly drifting welding gun. He grasped the handle, reversed it, and with one stroke severed the plastic cords that bound him.

Suddenly a beam sizzled over his head. One of the pirates had managed to get off a shot from his Brekmann Twelve.

Wayne dived for the open panel and jammed the leads back into the terminals of the paragravity generator. The sudden return of full gravity slammed the pirates to the floor—all except the Colonel, who had recovered from the shock of hitting the wall and had grabbed a handhold. His four henchmen were out, but the Colonel was very much awake—and angry. He released the handhold, dropped to the floor near Wayne, and charged savagely.

WAYNE MET THE CHARGE full on, and the heavy man's body drove him backward. They hugged for an instant, body against body. Wayne could hear the Colonel's fierce breathing. After a decade-long career of successful piracy, the Colonel was probably livid with rage at being trapped by

a single spaceman — and an unarmed technician, at that.

Wayne grunted as a fist ripped into his midsection. He caught breath, stepped to one side and swung the Colonel against the bulkhead door. There was a metallic clang, and the older man shook himself dazedly and returned to the fray.

He broke through Wayne's guard and landed two quick but ineffectual punches. "Damn you! Why don't you go down!"

It was the cry of a man who had his orders obeyed too long and too often.

Wayne smiled grimly. The stunned pirates were beginning to come to, and he knew he couldn't continue fighting with the Colonel for much longer. With a final fierce flurry, he drove the Colonel up against the wall and crashed through with a powerful blow to the jaw that slammed the pirate chief against the metal bulkhead.

Standing over the prostrate Colonel, Wayne wiped the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand and looked around. There was still plenty to be done.

He snatched a Brekmann pistol from the nearest pirate and trained it on the four henchmen. "Okay, stand up and get against the wall," he ordered. "You can leave your pistols in the middle of the floor."

Sullenly, the men complied.

Brant scooped up the three weapons and tucked them in his suit-belt, feeling oddly like a pirate himself with so many guns.

"March!" he snapped, and they marched, off into a corner of the communications room where Wayne could keep them under surveillance while repairing the radio transmitter.

He set to work, keeping one eye on his prisoners. Fifteen long minutes later, the *Thannis* finally arrived. The interstellar liner's bulk registered in the mass detectors on the wall, and Wayne Brant flicked on the screen.

He watched as the big ship an-

chored itself near the small pirate vessel.

"PRS 3391, this is the *Thannis*. You have a cargo for us to pick up?"

Wayne leaned toward the transmitter. "That's right," he said. "Send in four armed men. I've got five pirates here who seem pretty eager to stand trail."

"*Pirates?* Right away."

Wayne grinned at the five men who glowered at him. Keeping his Brekmann leveled steadily, he said, "You said you had a cargo for them, Colonel, and I know you're always a man of your word."

THE END

The mind technology that was developed for use in space:

SCIENTOLOGY: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THOUGHT

by

L. Ron Hubbard

Send One Dollar to the HASI

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Developed by L. Ron Hubbard, nuclear physicist and one of the great science fiction writers of all time. The book from which they get their psychological plots. This one you need.

Bigelow had a grand idea; he would travel more than a hundred years through time to Ford's Theatre, see the President, and warn him about—

THE ASSASSIN

by

Robert Silverberg

THE TIME WAS DRAWING near, Walter Bigelow thought. Just a few more adjustments, and his great ambition would be fulfilled.

He stepped back from the Time Distorter and studied the complex network of wires and tubes with an expert's practiced eye. TWENTY YEARS, he thought. Twenty years of working and scrimping, of pouring money into the machine that stood before him on the workbench. Twenty years, to save Abraham Lincoln's life.

And now he was almost ready.

Bigelow had conceived his grand idea when still young, newly out of college. He had stumbled across a volume of history and had read of Abraham Lincoln and his struggle to save the Union.

Bigelow was a tall, spare, raw-boned man standing better than six feet four—and with a shock

he discovered that he bore an amazing resemblance to a young portrait of the Great Emancipator. That was when his identification with Lincoln began.

He read every Lincoln biography he could find, steeped himself in log-cabin legends and the texts of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. And, gradually, he became consumed with bitterness because an assassin's hand had struck Lincoln down at the height of his triumph.

"Damned shame, great man like that," he mumbled into his beer one night in a bar.

"What's that?" a sallow man at his left asked. "Someone die?"

"Yes," Bigelow said. "I'm talking about Lincoln. Damned shame."

The other chuckled. "Better get yourself a new newspaper, pal. Lincoln's been dead for a century. Still mourning?"

Bigelow turned, his gaunt face

alive with anger. "Yes! Yes—why shouldn't I mourn? A great man like Lincoln—"

"Sure, sure," the other said placatingly. "I'll buy that. He was a great president, chum—but he's been dead for a hundred years. One hundred. You can't bring him back to life, you know."

"Maybe I can," Bigelow said suddenly—and the great idea was born.

It took eight years of physics and math before Bigelow had developed a workable time-travel theory. Seven more years passed before the first working model stood complete.

He tested it by stepping within its field, allowing himself to be cast back ten years. A few well-placed bets, and he had enough cash to continue. Ten years was not enough. Lincoln had been assassinated in 1865—Friday, April 14, 1865. Bigelow needed a machine that could move at least one hundred twenty years into the past.

It took time. Five more years.

He reached out, adjusted a capacitor, pinched off an unnecessary length of copper wire. It was ready. After twenty years, he was ready at last.

BIGELOW TOOK THE MORNING bus to Washington, D. C. The Time Distorter would not affect space, and it was much



more efficient to make the journey from Chicago to Washington in 1979 by monobus in a little over an hour, than in 1865 by mulecart or some other such conveyance, possibly taking a day. Now that he was so close to success, he was too impatient to allow any such delay as that.

The Time Distorter was cradled in a small black box on his lap; he spent the hour of the bus ride listening to its gentle humming and ticking, letting the sound soothe him and ease his nervousness.

There was really no need to be nervous, he thought. Even if he failed in his first attempt at blocking Lincoln's assassination, he had an infinity of time to keep trying again.

He could return to his own time and make the jump again, over and over. There were a hundred different ways he could use to prevent Lincoln from entering the fatal theater on the night of April 14. A sudden phone-call—no, there were no telephones yet. A message of some kind. He could burn down the theater the morning of the play. He could find John Wilkes Booth and kill him before he could make his fateful speech of defiance and fire the fatal bullet. He could—

Well, it didn't matter. He was going to succeed the first time. Lincoln was a man of sense; he wouldn't willingly go to his death

having been warned.

A warm glow of pleasure spread over Bigelow as he dreamed of the consequences of his act. Lincoln alive, going on to complete his second term, President until 1869. The weak, ineffectual Andrew Johnson would remain Vice-President, where he belonged. The South would be rebuilt sanely and welcomed back into the Union; there would be no era of carpetbaggers, no series of governmental scandals and no dreary Reconstruction era.

"Washington!"

Moving almost in a dream, Bigelow left the bus and stepped out into the crowded capitol streets. It was a warm summer day; soon, he thought, it would be a coolish April evening, back in 1865. . .

He headed for the poor part of town, away from the fine white buildings and gleaming domes. Huddling in a dark alley on the south side, he undid the fastenings of the box that covered the Time Distorter.

He glanced around, saw that no one was near. Then, swiftly, he depressed the lever.

THE WORLD SWIRLED around him, vanished.

Then, suddenly, it took shape again.

He was in an open field now; the morning air was cool but pleasant, and in the distance he could

see a few of the buildings that made the nation's capitol famous. There was no Lincoln Memorial, of course, and the bright needle of Washington's Monument did not thrust upward into the sky. But the familiar Capitol dome looked much as it always had, and he could make out the White House further away.

Bigelow refastened the cover of the Distorter and tucked the box under his arm. It clicked quietly, reminding him over and over again of the fact that he was in the year 1865—the morning of the day John Wilkes Booth put a bullet through the brain of Abraham Lincoln.

Time passed slowly for Bigelow. He made his way toward the center of town and spent the day in downtown Washington, hungrily drinking in the gossip. Abe Lincoln's name was on everyone's tongue.

The dread War had ended just five days before with Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Lincoln was in his hour of triumph. It was Friday. The people were still discussing the speech he had made the Tuesday before.

"He said he's going to make an announcement," someone said. "Abe's going to tell the Southerners what kind of program he's going to put into effect for them."

"Wonder what's on his mind?" someone else asked.

"No matter what it is, I'll bet he makes the South like what he says."

He had never delivered that speech, Bigelow thought. And the South had been doomed to a generation of hardship and exploitation by the victorious North that had left unhealing scars.

The day passed. President Lincoln was to attend the Ford Theatre that night, to see a production of a play called "Our American Cousin."

Bigelow knew what the history books said. Lincoln had had an apprehensive dream the night before: he was sailing on a ship of a peculiar build, being borne on it with great speed toward a dark and undefined shore. Like Caesar on the Ides of March, he had been warned—and, like Caesar, he would go unheeding to his death.

But Bigelow would see that that never happened.

History recorded that Lincoln attended the performance, that he seemed to be enjoying the play. And that shortly after ten that evening, a wild-eyed man would enter Lincoln's box, fire once, and leap to the stage, shouting, "Sic semper tyrannis!"

The man would be the crazed actor John Wilkes Booth. He would snag a spur in the drapery as he dropped to the stage, and would break his leg—but nevertheless he

would vanish into the wings, make his way through the theater he knew so well, mount a horse waiting at the stage door. Some days later he would be dead.

As for President Lincoln, he would slump forward in his box. The audience would be too stunned to move for a moment—but there was nothing that could be done. Lincoln would die the next morning without recovering consciousness.

"Now he belongs to the ages," Secretary of State Stanton would say.

No! Bigelow thought. It would not happen. It would not happen . . .

EVENING APPROACHED. Bigelow, crouching in an alley across the street from the theater, watched the carriages arriving for the performance that night. Feeling oddly out of place in his twentieth-century clothing, he watched the finely-dressed ladies and gentlemen descending from their coaches. Everyone in Washington knew the President would be at the theater that night, and they were determined to look their best.

Bigelow waited. Finally, a handsome carriage appeared, and several others made way for it. He tensed, knowing who was within.

A woman of regal bearing descended first—Mary Todd Lincoln, the President's wife. And then

Lincoln appeared.

For some reason, the President paused at the street-corner and looked around. His eyes came to rest on the dark alley where Bigelow crouched invisibly, and Bigelow stared at the face he knew almost as well as his own: the graying beard, the tired, old, wrinkled face, the weary eyes of Abe Lincoln.

Then he rose and began to run.

"Mr. President! Mr. President!"

He realized he must have been an outlandish figure, dashing across the street in his strange costume with the Time Distorter clutched under one arm. He drew close to Lincoln.

"Sir, don't go to the theater tonight! If you do—"

A hand suddenly wrapped itself around his mouth. President Lincoln smiled pityingly and turned away, walking on down the street toward the theater. Other hands seized Bigelow, dragged him away. Blue-clad arms. Union soldiers. The President's bodyguard.

"You don't understand!" Bigelow yelled. He bit at the hand that held him, and got a fierce kick in return. "Let go of me! Let go!"

There were four of them, earnest-looking as they went about their duties. They held Bigelow, pummelled him angrily. One of them reached down for the Distorter.

In terror Bigelow saw that his

attempt to save Lincoln had been a complete failure, that he would have to return to his own time and try all over again. He attempted to switch on the Distorter, but before he could open the cover rough hands had pulled it from him.

"Give me that!" He fought frantically, but they held him. One of the men in blue uniforms took the Distorter, looked at it curiously, finally held it up to his ear.

His eyes widened. "It's ticking! It's a bomb!"

"No!" Bigelow shouted, and then watched in utter horror as the

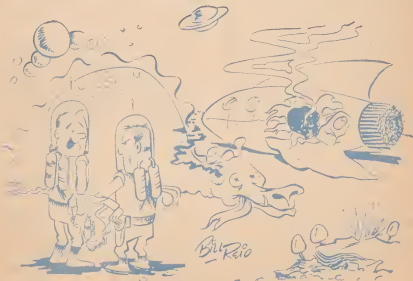
soldier, holding the Distorter at arm's length, ran across the street and hurled the supposed bomb as far up the alley as he could possibly throw it.

There was no explosion—only the sound of delicate machinery shattering.

Bigelow watched numbly as the four men seized his arms again.

"Throw a bomb, will you? Come on, fellow—we'll show you what happens to guys who want to assassinate President Lincoln!"

Further down the street, the gaunt figure of Abe Lincoln was just entering the theater. No one gave Bigelow a chance to explain.



"Well, we won't starve to death."



A department for all our readers throughout the world; here you can meet new friends who are interested in the same things you are. Listings are free, so send in yours today!

SEAFARER

Victor Gustine: Box 348, RFD 1, Pasadena, Md.

Age 39: "I'm an ex-seafarer, widower, and s-f fan since 1928 when I bought my first copy of a science fiction magazine. My major interests are studies of 'illogical happenings', the Time Concept, and the illusive phenomenon referred to as 'sixth sense'. With respect to the latter I'm particularly interested in so-called 'feminine intuition' and would like to hear from others with ideas on the subject."

HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR

Laurie G. Schoenbaum: 845 West End Ave., New York 25, N.Y.

Age 17: "I'm a senior here at Hunter High, interested in law, psychology, creative writing, cars, dancing, music — and naturally, science fiction! I'm five feet tall,

black hair, brown eyes, with the nickname of 'half pint' — but not intellectually! I'd like to write to anyone interested."

SHIPPING CLERK

Carroll W. Schaffer: 265 S. St. Andrews Pl., Los Angeles 4, Cal.

Age 30: "I work as a shipping clerk while attending night school, studying TV writing. Have been an s-f fan for 10 years and would like to write to other enthusiasts. I'm quite interested in s-f clubs."

CHESS HOBBYIST

Thomas D. Hritz: 407 W. Madison, Kirkwood, Mo.

Age 17: "I'm a student, science fiction fan, and chess enthusiast. I don't have many over-the-board players, so I'd like to find others interested in playing by mail. I'm also interested in foreign languages

—classical Greek and modern Czech particularly.”

PHARMACIST

Harry M. Fish: 820 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, Cal.

Age 50: “I’m a pharmacist by profession, and former Army Medical Corpsman. I’m quite interested in interplanetary travel and would like to contact others to discuss the subject.”

STUDENT

James Wanger: 44 Custer St., Buffalo 14, N.Y.

Age 13: “I’m a student interested in rocketry—theory and design. Other interests include chess, ham radio, and s-f writing. Also like all sports.”

MUSIC TEACHER

Joie O. Drake: 623 Third St., Ann Arbor, Mich.

Age 25: “I’m a ‘grass widow’, mother of two small girls, music teacher (Hawaiian guitar) by profession, with more than passing proficiency at piano and piano accordion. Enjoy both popular and classical music. Other interests include photography and sports. Will welcome correspondence on above—or practically any subject.”

STUDENT

Peter V. Kane, Jr.: 241 12th St., West Babylon, N.Y.

Age 14: “I’m interested in corresponding with anyone who’d like

to exchange ideas on s-f. I’m particularly interested in the subjects of psi powers, Time travel, and Parallel Worlds.”

AUTO MECHANIC

Nicholas De Morgan: Box 183, Ridgefield, N.J.

Age 32: “I’m an auto mechanic by trade, science fiction-fantasy collector by hobby. I’m interested in reaching other collectors to compare notes on files, swapping, etc. My file composes more than 2500 items.”

STUDENT

Fred Schurch: 2567 Bainbridge Ave., New York 58, N.Y.

Age 15: “I’m interested in corresponding with others on science fiction, physics, and hypnosis. I’m a junior in school, 5’ 10”, active in boat racing, swimming, road racing, and on the more academic level, rocketry. Will appreciate hearing from others as soon as possible. Gals certainly not excluded!”

WOULD-BE WRITER

Alberta Leek: Oak Ridge, N.J.

Age 32: “I’ve been married 14 years and have six children, but this doesn’t prevent me from following science fiction avidly. Matter of fact I’m Trade Manager of the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club. I’ve just completed a writing course, and have hopes of starting a writing career. I’d like to hear from any s-f enthusiasts.”

WRITER

Thomas E. Wade: Marfrance, W. Va.

Age 52: "I'm interested in the study of advanced spiritualism, and advanced psychic science. I'm a writer on both subjects. Would like to reach others with similar interests."

STUDENT

Vincent Roach: RR 9, Box 220F, Indianapolis, Ind.

Age 12: "I'm an eighth grade student, and like equally well — girls, science fiction, and Elvis Presley! Will correspond with all rock & roll fans, s-f fans, science & radio bugs, and collectors."

AIRCRAFT WORKER

Robert L. Brown: 5154 Gloria Ave., Encino, Cal.

Age 27: "I'm single, working for 20th Century Aircraft Company as a Production Control Clerk. My hobbies are reading (s-f), good music, and movies. I'd like to be a pen-pal of anyone with similar interests."

STUDENT

Bonnie Dimitry: 1200 East Ave., Rochester 7, N.Y.

Age 15: "I'm a sophomore, 5' 5½" interested in writing to other sci-fi fans. My hobbies are collecting s-f books and magazines, and dancing. I'd like to join a sci-fi fan club, and would particularly like to hear from guys and gals in foreign lands."

ENGINEERING STUDENT

Michael J. Dunn: A-323 Emmons Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich.

Age 18: "I'm studying chemical engineering, with science fiction being my hobby. I'm interested in the more technical aspects of missiles and rockets, and shall be working during the summer at Chrysler Corporation's Guided Missile Dept. Other than my love for s-f, I like classical music, fencing, girls, cars, and short story writing. Also chess and hiking. Hope to hear from anyone with similar interests."

STUDENT

Daniel Pittinsky: 527 Hinsdale St., Brooklyn 7, N.Y.

Age 13: "I'm a science fiction fan who'd like to hear from others interested in same, and stamp collecting and chemistry."

ALUMINUM WORKER

Duane C. Foster: Gen. Del., Main P. O., Kitimat, B.C., Canada

Age 19: "I'm single, working in defense production of aluminum. My hobbies include astronomy, popular recordings, and solid and liquid fuel rocketry. Also photography, model railroading, and reading — mostly s-f. For sports I like pro football, and on the personal participation side, snow-shoeing. Would like to hear from guys and gals, particularly in Western Canada and Pacific Northwest area of America where I have traveled quite a bit."

HOBBYIST

Robert F. Martin: Box 961, Bronx, N. Y.

Age 21: "I'm a hobbyist, following jazz, basketball, history, science fiction, and coin collecting. Would like to hear from others similarly inclined."

"DOWN UNDER" FAN

Roger Dard: P. O. Box S1387, G.P. O., Perth, Western Australia.

Age 35: "I'm a long time science-fiction and fantasy fan with a large collection of books and magazines, particularly British and Australian items. I'd like to swap books, magazines, or stamps of comic sections of U.S. Sunday Newspapers as I keep bound files in my collection and find them difficult to obtain in this part of the world. Will look forward to hearing from anyone."

STUDENT

Jack Sayers: 1280 Winston Ave., San Marino 9, Cal.

Age 16: "I've been reading s-f for nine years and hope to be a writer of same. I collect books and magazines and would like to hear from other s-f collectors."

HOUSEWIFE

Jeanette Nagle: 155 Xavier St., Denver 19, Colo.

Age 26: "I'm an avid s-f reader

and love to write letters. My husband and I are motorcycle enthusiasts and take our yearly vacation via cycle. Hope to contact others with similar interest."

FREIGHT RECORD CLERK

Knight W. Cashwell: Rt. 4, Box 630, Salisbury, N. C.

Age 42: "I'm a freight record clerk for the Southern Railway — comptometer operator. Favorite sports, baseball and boxing. Like poetry and philosophy, collecting good poetry and scenic cards from various places. Hope to receive many from pen-club fans."

STUDENT

Bruce Maguire: 3866 Nootka St., Vancouver 12, B. C., Canada

Age 17: "I'm a high school student, interested in science fiction, journalism, football, ice hockey, and dancing. Would like to correspond with guys and gals anywhere."

STUDENT

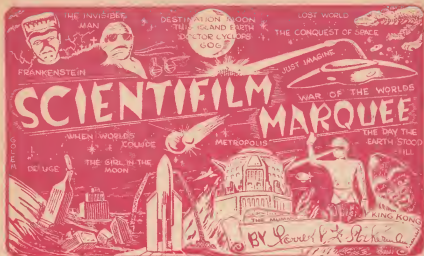
Denny Hill: Box 365, Palouse, Wash.

Age 15: "I'm an avid s-f fan, also enjoying a game of pool and swimming. Will correspond with all fans."

Ed. Note: In writing to us for your listing please include name, address, age, occupation, and subjects of your interest.

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— SEE PAGE 130 FOR BONUS OFFER —



A SCI-FI FAN, teenage variety, will be portrayed on the screen in American-International's filmization of "The Cosmic Frame" by Paul W. Fairman. This is the second scientifilm sale for Fairman, whose "Deadly City" was filmed as *Target - - Earth!* A Hitchcock-type suspense melodrama will be developed from "The Cosmic Frame", to be released under the marquee title of *Attack of the Saucer Men*. As Saucerians are small, and green, there is some possibility of Tam Otteson's Newyorcon hit tune, "The Little Green Men" being incorporated into the film. Sam Merwin, Jr., has submitted a cinema-daptation of the story. The beanie-aged egghead in the script will be known as J. Forester Eckman (courtesy of his creators, Bob Silverberg & Randy Garrett), and any resemblance he may bear to the columnist

behind SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE, living or dead or zombic, will be less than coincidental. Sci-fi artist Paul Blaisdell, who incidentally can be seen as *himself* in *The Undead* (he's the corpse in the coffin), will create the skinsuits for the Saucerians.

KRONOS or *War of the Universe*, they're one and the same picture with release title not decided on as yet. Had a reunion on the set with Kurt Neumann, whom I had not seen since he directed *Rocketship X-M*. He directed me over to the Synchro Unifying Sinometric Integrating Equitensor (Susie, for short) where I had several pictures taken with Jeff Morrow, star of this one as well as (as Exeter) of Raymond F. Jones' *This Island Earth*, and *The Giant Claw* to come from Columbia. Between Neumann and Morrow I got a fair idea of the plot, which is about a mobile cubic

metal monster of extraterrestrial origin seeking an energy supply here on Earth and doubling in girth with every erg-ohmlet it absorbs until it's as big as all outdoors.

Flory Films is dickering with the Science Fiction Agency for screen rights to AE van Vogt's "The Great Judge". Same agency was responsible for sale of Amelia Reynolds Long's "The Thought Monster" to Amalgamated Films, which Anglo-American liaison will also produce *The Dream Machine*, screenplay by London fan and Esperantist Charles Eric Maine from his own novel, "Escapement". Latter is the Londöner's third screen sale, previous two being *The Atomic Man* (book title: "The Isotope Man") and *Spaceways* (book and teleplay of the same name).

Another Anglofan turned pro, CSYoud, professionally known as John Christopher, has struck it rich with a novel variously known in the land of its origin and the USA as "The Death of Grass" and "No Blade of Grass". It may have been serialized in Saturday Evening Post by the time you read this, and it will be Simon-&-Schustered between hard covers, with pocket-book publication undoubtedly following. The author tells me picture interest in the work has already been expressed by no less a personage than Alec Guinness!

The Screaming Well is being shot at the actual scene of the Mayan city ruins in Mexico. A two-cast, bi-lingual production for release both south and north of the border, it's from an original script by Hollywood's hot new writing pair, Budd Bankson & Larry Jackson. The

Spirit of the Sun God still lives, in the form of an ageless malformed giant who inhabits an underground grotto beneath the sacrificial well.

Long dead, still mourned Stanley Weinbaum will be revived via one of his hardest works, "The Adaptive Ultimate", adapted for television so many times I've lost count (the version s.f. authoress Doris Gilbert did was called *Beyond Belief* when Ivan Tors purchased rights via me for a Science Fiction Theater stanza). At last we're to have a theatrical bonanza of the perennial favorite. Regal Films has produced it under the title of *The She-Devil*. Mari Blanchard portrays the menacing Kyra Zelas: beauteous, ambitious—and indestructible! Regal has also become interested in the late Ray Cummings' property, "The Coming of the Giant Germs".

Anti-gravity will be treated with levity in *The Floater*, a scientifarce in preparation at 20th-Fox by former actor Dick Powell under his producer-director pact there. Screenplay by Frank Tashlin.

COBALT BOMB has been registered with a bang by producer Charles Schneer for one of his forthcoming productions . . . *The Black Scorpion*, directed by Edward (not our sci-fi guy) Ludwig, has been edited at Warner Bros. after 3 months of location filming in and around Mexico City. Barney Orndung tells me the scorpion is about as big as last year's *Tarantula* . . . While from informant Charlie Nuetzel I learn that giant grasshoppers give civilization a bad time in *The Beginning of the End*.

Jack Hanley, New York writer, has hit Hollywood with a choice

property under his arm: the movie rights to Horace Gold's 'nova' story, "A Matter of Form".

COLOR AND WIDE SCREEN will enhance the next jungle adventure of Tarzan, to be filmed for the most part in Africa and titled *Cave of the Winds*. Lloyd Richards, man responsible for the development stages of TV Tarzan, will be the executive producer.

"The Horla", horror-fantasy classic by Guy de Maupassant, has been screenplayed by Barre Lyndon, who collected kudos for his similar job on HG Wells' "War of the Worlds".

Following completion of *Daughter of Dr. Jekyll* for Allied Artists, producer Jack Pollexfen has scheduled an artificial satellite story, *Vampire Planet*, for his Film Ventures outfit. Thanks to Rickert von Halspiegel for this information . . . And thank you, Don Grollman, for details about "The Other One", the Henry Holt-Dell novel by Catherine Turney of ancient evil alive in modern times, Gothic horror in the here and now, of the soul of a woman 6 years dead usurping the body of a man's bride. Robert Stabler will produce it for Regal Films . . . Jack Kevan will produce, Irvin Berwick direct, an original screenplay by the collaborators, *They Came to Destroy the Earth*.

'Dynamation', my friend Ray (Kong) Harryhausen tells me, is the name of the new electronic process which will lend the simulacrum of life to his Giant Ymir creation in *Twenty Million Miles to Earth* . . . Roger Corman says he's budgetted \$50,000 for special effects

alone in his forthcoming *Attack of the Crab Monsters*. As I recall, the entire cost of one of his earliest films, *The Beast with A Million Eyes*, was about half that. Beasts are getting beastier all the time!

A Tom Swift series is planned for television. *The Man Who Turned to Stone*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, *The Undead*, *Voodoo Woman* and *Voodoo Island* have all been previewed here in Hollywood, which means they'll be playing your area any time now. You can also start checking the newspaper ads for playdates on the following: *The Living Idol*, *The Monster That Challenged the World*, *Mark of the Vampire*, *Pharaoh's Curse*, *The Cyclops*, *X the Unknown*, *The 27th Day* and *Not of This Earth*.

Further on, before year's end, you may have to look forward to: *Mono-lith*, *Pygmy Island*, *The Amazing Nth Man*, *Werewolves of Darkness*, *The Night the World Exploded*, and *The Curse of Frankenstein*.

Just days before his death, footage was shot on the late Bela Lugosi for what will prove to be a posthumous performance. Thank you, Hope Lugosi, Tor Johnson and Dick Sheffield for your phone calls, all to alert me that Lugosi's last film will be titled *Grave Robbers from Outer Space*, with Vampira herself in the cast, as well as Tor (the Swedish Angel) Johnson, and narrated by the 20th century profit and seer, Jerome King Criswell.

—Forrest J. Ackerman

SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE is a regular feature. Columnist Ackerman may be contacted via the Beverly Hills, Calif., telephone exchange by interested contributors.

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- Male and female reaching climax at same time

- Female Masturbation
- Causes of sexual excitement in men
- How male organs function during intercourse
- How female sex organs function during intercourse
- How sexual desire in women differs from men
- Four movements of woman's perfect complete orgasm

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Letters

from the

Readers

AN ARTIST'S RETORT

Dear Bill:

I have long been set upon and irked by so-called "art critics" in my fifteen years of science fiction illustrating.

The latest criticism calls for me to reply. I would suggest that David P. Sparks of Louisville (his letter in the May issue) again read **THE ULTIMATE WEAPON** in the January issue. Beginning specifically on page 9, line 23, he will find a very accurate description of the cover scene. I was not depicting the ultimate weapon on the cover but the above mentioned scene.

As you know, I read every story I illustrate and always try to depict the most dramatic scene in the story. That is, unless we mutually alter it or go symbolic—which is not too frequent.

Mr. Sparks reminds me of another critic years ago at **AMAZING STORIES**. I had done an illustration showing one of the characters with a ray gun. A small arms ex-

pert (?) at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds wrote me a seven page letter—highly technical—telling me why it wouldn't work!

Which, I suppose, was actually a compliment . . .

Malcolm Smith

202 Lanford Lane

Prospect Heights, Ill.

You're right on all counts . . . with

SUITS HIM JUST FINE

Dear Bill:

Have just finished reading your March '57 **TALES** and consider it one of the best. I have never subscribed to an s-f mag because I never could find one that suited me. I like a variety and you really have a wonderful variety of stories in **TALES**. Enclosed, my sub!

THE TATTOOED MAN by Alex Blade is one of the—if not the best—stories I have ever read. Keep printing novels of this caliber and you won't be able to supply the demand for your mag. I also liked **STARSHIP SABOTEUR**.

Why not run photos and biographies of your writers? We might be able to enjoy the stories a little better if we knew something about the people who write them.

David A. Westfall
P.O. Box 95
Garrett, Ind.

In the past—particularly in our companion science fiction magazine, IMAGINATION, we've run photos and biogs on our writers. Only problem was we didn't feel it necessary to run them more than once. However, since both of our books have many new readers now we'll give serious thought to reviving the "Introducing The Author" series . . . wh

TENNESHAW GOOFED?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I just finished reading Mr. Tenneshaw's ironic little gem entitled THE MAN WHO HATED NOISE in the March issue. I haven't read the rest of your classy little mag yet, but I felt compelled to take time out to mention one glaring little goof.

Hasn't Mr. Tenneshaw ever heard of CONELRAD? Mrs. Barnaby's TV set would have been off the air—but completely—if an attack were imminent. Only CONELRAD bands would have been in operation at that time.

No wonder Mr. Pimms "saw the awful light and felt the searing heat" with a TV signal for the enemy bombers to home in on.

I'm rather curious as to how many s-f fans and readers have been indoctrinated with the info on CONELRAD. How many letters did you receive pointing out this

goof?

Karen Hayden
Box 666
Cornelius, Ore.

Yours has been the only one, Karen. But is it a goof? In times of emergency the best laid plans can go astray—not to mention amiss. Besides, how can we assume that enemy bombers would require a TV signal to home in on? If an attack were planned and executed it stands to reason that the course would be well plotted ahead of time! . . . wh

ENCORE!—AND STUFF

Dear Bill Hamling:

I thought the March issue of TALES was spectacular, especially Tenneshaw's THE MAN WHO HATED NOISE. Encore! As for the lead novel, THE TATTOOED MAN, it sounds familiar—otherwise it is a good story and I'm not griping.

Keep on giving us those out-of-this-world cartoons. They make both *Madge* and *Tales* different from others.

One question before I sign off. Why are the s-f creatures from space (BEMs) so corny in the movies?

Edward Jazdzewski
2031 S. Herman St.
Milwaukee 7, Wisc.

Movie BEMs come under the heading "special effects" and special effects cost plenty. Whenever you see a convincing "alien" in a film you can bet that money was freely spent. Whenever they appear corny you can rest assured the producer tossed two-bits at the makeup department and/or technical staff and told them to go buy a beanie . . . wh

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STF PUZZLER

Dear Bill:

Finally I broke down and decided to let you know how much I enjoy *MADGE* and *TALES*. Which is very much indeed.

But one little thing has been bothering me ever since I started reading your books. It seems silly, but what is this "stf" business all about? If it's an abbreviation for Science Fiction how come the "t"?

Except for this puzzler I think your mags are fine. And to prove it, here's my subscription. So how do you like that?

Mrs. Audie Meyer
8358 Wiswell
Cincinnati, Ohio

We like it just fine! . . . The stf does indeed stand for science fiction. It stems back to the 1920s when Gernsback in AMAZING STORIES referred to science fiction as "scientifiction". Thus the "stf" was handed down wh

NO DEARTH OF WONDER

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have just finished reading *THE TATTOOED MAN* by Alex Blade in the March issue. I'll make it short. It was not as good as his *THE COSMIC KINGS* but it was well up to par.

After finishing the novel I turned to the letter section and came upon a statement by Allen Mann wherein he remarked that *TALES* has no sense of wonder. I think he's all mixed up. *OTHER WORLDS* may have a sense of wonder, but *GALAXY* and *IF* certainly do now. *GALAXY* and *IF* are only copies of *ASTOUNDING* which for my dough

is written by psychiatrists!

IMAGINATIVE TALES and IMAGINATION are among the few "true" science fiction magazines to be bought on the newsstands today.

So why doesn't Mr. Mann go back to reading Psychiatric Tales . .

Kirby McCauley
2374 Sepulveda Ave.
San Bernardino, Calif.

Not a bad title for some enterprising publisher to capitalize on. Have a hunch it would sell well to! . . . wh

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Dear Bill:

I'd like to have the answer to some questions, but first I want to tell you that I enjoy both your magazines. Especially liked THE COSMIC KINGS last year and in the March issue of this year, THE TATTOOED MAN. Alex Blade does fine.

Now the questions:

1. What's happened to A. E. Van Vogt?

2. Who publishes OTHER WORLDS?

3. Why don't you make room for a Sky Map each issue in *Madge and Tales*?

4. When did you start publishing IMAGINATIVE TALES and do you have any back issues of your early years?

Manuel Guerra
1790 E. 28th St.
Lorain, Ohio

Haven't any idea what Van Vogt is working on at the moment, but if you'll turn the page, we're offering his brand new novel as a bonus subscription offer! . . . Ray Palmer publishes OTHER WORLDS; his address, Amherst, Wisc. . . . Sky Map? It's a new thought all right. We'll mull it over . . . TALES first came out in September 1954. Glance down at the back issue coupon on this page. That's what we have available at this time. —Which closes up shop for this month, gang. See you next issue wh

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